

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON

(OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 383.

FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 2ND, 1896.

[ONE PENNY.]

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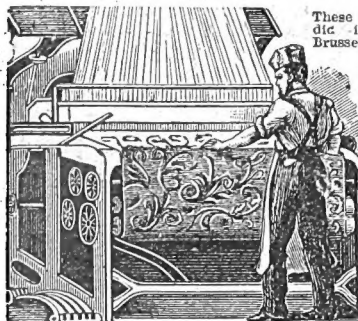
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4...	10	0	0	0	13...	15	0	0	0
5...	10	0	0	0	14...	15	0	0	0
6...	12	0	0	0	15...	15	0	0	0
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No. 18

May 2, 1896.

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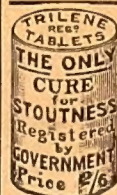
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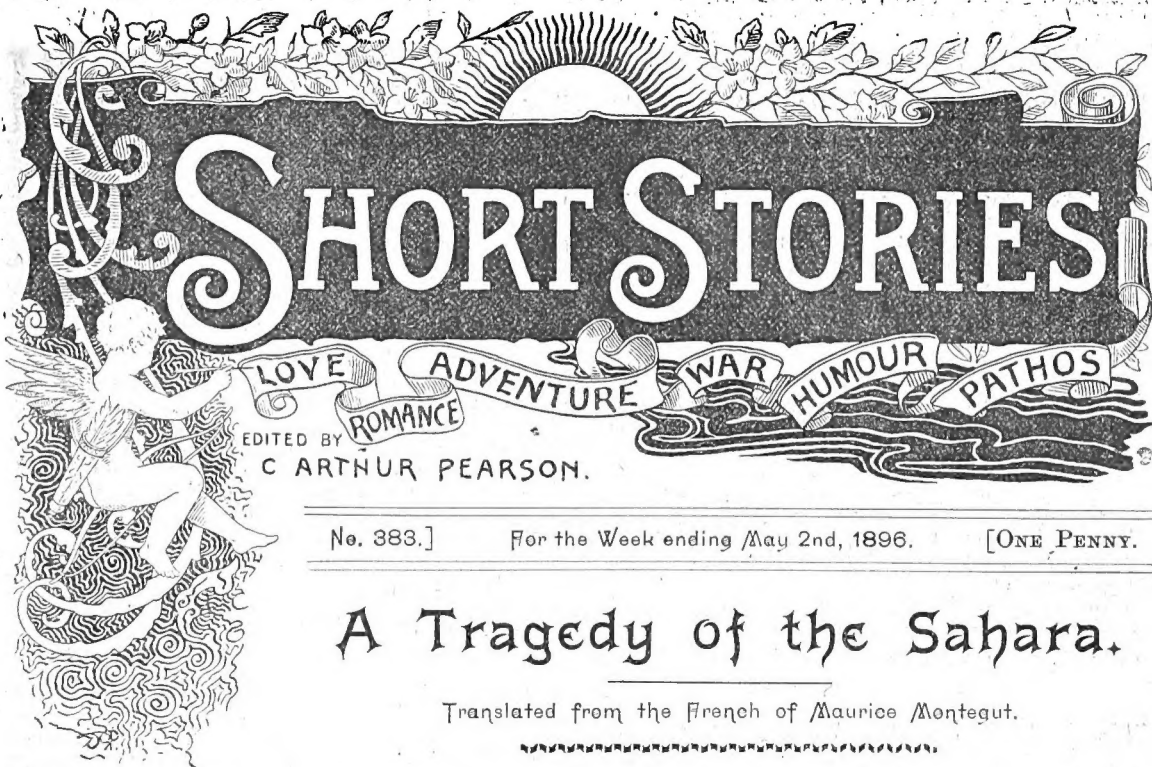
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No. 383.]

For the Week ending May 2nd, 1896.

[ONE PENNY.]

A Tragedy of the Sahara.

Translated from the French of Maurice Montegut.

IN our times, France's great African colonies are subdued for ever; but in other days, during the attempts of a laborious conquest, every moment held a danger. Skirmishes were incessant, real combats were frequent, and each post of the extreme vanguard had its romantic episodes, to be related later. Here is one of them.

Soft and wavering the wind blew up off the scorched waste of sandy desert, the air freshened suddenly, and night fell. Like a barrier upon the horizon the ascending hills gradually took on tints of lilac; to the right and to the left stretched the plain of reddish sand, traversed irregularly by ravines of less or greater darkness, according to their depth, and by strange palm-groves, yellow, dusty, sunburnt. Twilight is unknown in Africa; darkness falls there with a push, like a curtain, and this swiftness of change of setting is accentuated correspondingly as the dry country is reached, in the heart of the desert, in the unexplored lands. Here, past the High Plains, beyond Saïda, Ain-Seffra, almost into Morôcco, on the borders of the mysterious Fighig, at the farthest point whither the exploring columns have penetrated, this natural phenomenon is profoundly noticeable; the shades invade the earth in the briefest moment, and change and darken it with their clouds as ink darkens water.

A bugle sounded within the circle of tents; the horses of the picket lifted their heads, and the *chasseurs*, in their wide blouses and trousers of linen, went to form in line slowly for the evening roll-call. The bugle, loud and shrill, was echoed again and again, carried by the sonorous swells to the foot of the tranquil mountains, where the sound died out. The squadron was formed on the right. Cabarousse, captain, commanding, and his two lieutenants, Peyralte and Vaudras, all drowsy,

regarded the manœuvre carelessly, without uttering a word, with their arms drooping, and all about, far, near above, everywhere, there reigned a silence so great that it seemed religious, sacred, full of august mysteries.

The roll-call was begun. After each name followed the brief, monotonous answers, as each day at that hour, with the apathetic indifference of mechanical exertion. The adjutant did not even pause before passing from one name to another.

"Present!—esent!—sent!"

"Hanrion?"

No one answered. The adjutant, surprised, lifted his gaze from his roll-book, and repeated:

"Hanrion?"

No answer.

"Well! are you deaf, you Hanrion?"

No answer.

A soldier was missing. His companions of the ranks spread their hands and gesticulated in token that they knew nothing, comprehended nothing. Cabarousse came forward.

"Let us see. Who was the last man to see Hanrion? Where was it? When was it? Speak up now?"

In the morning, at roll-call; none had seen him since.

"Finish the roll-call! Break—ranks!"

So there was a soldier missing. In the neighbourhood of a city, Cabarousse would have shrugged his shoulders, saying simply: "A hair thrown to the winds!" but here in this complete solitude, twenty leagues from the last advanced post, an absent man might as well be counted dead at once. And in a squadron alone there, isolated, lost, and entirely dependent upon itself, a call without response was enough to chill the boldest. In the desert, ranks are inevitably narrowed, and individualities are allied; no one is unknown, all are comrades, and one of these comrades had disappeared.

In every group, whether the sleeves were blank or braided, that disappearance was discussed passionately, with the instinctive horror of the thought: "If it were I!" For human selfishness is never lost completely; all solidarity rests on personal considerations.

The country here was not, however, openly dangerous, not avowedly hostile; the bands of nomad Arabs had been repulsed, driven back to the mountains, and only a Kabyle village had its huts a short distance away. But the Kabyles are sedentary, of lazy habits, and they regard with indifference the foreign troops defiling past them in clouds of golden dust, and strike not, unless they are attacked in their own dwellings, under their roofs of mud and stone.

And yet, nevertheless, Cabarousse, suspicious, twisting his moustache, looked obstinately to that side where lay the Kabyle village. There, he was convinced, lay the solution of the mystery. Suddenly he strode towards the group of soldiers.

"Here, let us see about this! no more trifling! Does anyone know anything?—there must be a woman in this business—a Kabyle woman, eh? Answer—one or another, or all at once! But answer, or else——"

"A woman—or more than one! it is the same thing," let slip a soldier, shaking his head knowingly.

"Here, you! come forward and tell what you know."

The soldier advanced and spoke out, finally. He was a barrack's gossip, a swaggerer, and he spoke after his kind. "Well, this is about it, my captain; one is not made of wood, you see, and the desert is wide, and six months is a long time. It is very hard—not to see a woman for that long." Then he went on to say that the Kabyle girls were wont to go to wash their bright-coloured rags at a rill at no great distance from the camp, and "the devil! one gets a twist in both eyes when one sees their brown, round ankles, as they go down to the gully. But that is all! as to their heads, they are so toggled out that one sees only their eyes. But such eyes! That scamp Hanrion liked to go to watch them wash—a fancy like any other. He declared that the tallest and the shortest of them winked at him sidewise as they passed him; and that always pleases a man, wherever he may be, my captain——"

"That is enough!" cried Cabarousse, and he gave the order to saddle the horses.

Thirty men were left in charge of the tents. The others were galloping in the bright moonlight, and by the clear rays horses and riders projected gigantic shadows, scattered by the haste of march, but equal in dimensions, the lines being maintained strictly. The thirst for battle and the joy of vengeance impelled the squadron; besides, any excitement is welcome which comes to break the monotony of long days of idleness. Then forward! Uprose and fled from the road the marauding jackals whose shrill squeals insult from afar their natural enemy, man, once he is safely past them. Now and then a sabre sounded against a stirrup, or a horse which left his place was by force of hand returned thither; but always the troop continued advancing with spectral aspect, forming an ever-retreating picture.

The soldiers were content with the expedition perceiving that the death of one among them was not to be passed over indifferently, and that all bloody memories would find prompt vengeance. Little by little, a sparse vegetation spread beneath the feet of the horses; then the way was streaked by the silhouettes of palm trees; farther yet, and the Kabyle village stood confusedly out from the earth, with its mud-hovels, low, narrow-windowed, whose doors were too small for

human stature; and round about the inclosures for cattle, now vacant.

At a brief word of command, the squadron halted. No light shone, all was dark; no one moved, nor anything whatever. Only a few vagabond dogs, scenting the strangers, barked. The troop surrounded, at a walk, the village, still silent, still dark. Dismount! They entered the first hut, and it was vacant; the inhabitants had fled, taking their effects and weapons. This was their guilty confession. More than that all farther search was now useless and without purpose.

But what was that? Lying across a doorway, with its face in a heap of filth, was the body of a man, with its throat cut, its face bathed in blood. It was Hanrion. Then, on the vast night, arose a clamour of rage, which presently sinks into grief—a tone of unspeakable sadness, of supreme pity. Afar stretch the undulating plains; and the imperturbable chain of hills, black now, seemed insolently to bar the way to reprisals.

Stiff upon his horse, gloomy and forbidding in the clear night, Cabarousse shook his clenched hand at the invisible, as one who dreams of vengeance.

"Lieutenant!" he cried at last, "take fifty men and crush that brood of maggots until not two are left living! Oh, that I must stay at my post! that I might go with you!"

When the ranks were formed, the sub-lieutenant, Philippe Vaudras, saluted and started with his fifty men towards the Unknown, before them, while Cabarousse and his squad returned at a foot-pace, in their own despite, to the camp, with heads bent, with hearts saddened, bearing, laid across two horses, the bloodstained body of the murdered Hanrion.

Tall, slender, a lionine blonde, with clear blue eyes, when he left the military school, Philippe Vaudras had chosen Africa as a field for adventure, and, in a year of camp-life, he had made himself noted for his bravery, and this in a wild squadron where every man was valiant. Because of his white hands, his sweet voice, and his youth, the soldiers called him "Lady Sub-Lieutenant;" but, when he charged across the plain, that "little one" gladdened the heart; his horse had splendid legs, and was always first in the combat; and—what a powerful fist had "my lady sub-lieutenant!" His soldiers were fain to follow Vaudras, since they could never get before him; and they followed him with enthusiasm, drunken with his wildness, and, above all, so that nothing of ill should befall him. He seemed precisely the chief necessary for that romantic expedition, for that tragic, for that setting extraordinarily tragic; after him, his troop would follow blindly.

At the head of the van-guard and on the flanks of the squads, the guides, the explorers, the pathfinders, bent over their pommels, with their gaze fixed on the ground, directing their course by tracks almost invisible by the pale light. Across a width of forty yards, there appeared in the sand deep marks, footprints of men and beasts, whose wide spaces attested the tumultuous flight, the disorder of defeat, beneath the furious lashes of the Kabyle drivers, terrified by that corpse they left behind them.

The horses of the pursuers were panting. "Halt!" commanded Vaudras. The *chasseurs* camped as well as they could; they lay down to sleep with an arm through the bridle, and, in spite of the jerks and pulls of the animals, their sleep was deep and dreamless. At last, a faint white streak appeared on the horizon; dawn was breaking; and suddenly a growing light dispelled the shadows and discovered distant objects. Then, on the

flank of the hills, appeared the tribes they were pursuing, a long, grey line of men, women, and children, of sheep and oxen, climbing the heights in haste, and the air conveyed to them, like a call, the lowing of the oxen and the bleating of the sheep.

With one simultaneous shout, the riders spurred to a gallop; but if they saw, they were seen also; and the Kabyles, abandoning already the heaviest of their luggage, ran up the steeps in a revolt of confusion. They were lost to sight in the chaos of gigantic boulders; one by one, as ants bury themselves in the earth, they were hidden to the last one in the hollows of the mountains. All that remained in sight were a few oxen, uneasy, turning towards the plain, lowing sadly, with necks stretched, muzzles thrust out, and nostrils flaring.

An hour later, Vaudras and his troopers found themselves all at once within a hundred yards of the enemy, having arrived thither by means of literal goat-paths. The Kabyles had made front and were awaiting them. The situation explained their audacity. Between the fugitive tribe and the blue and red *chasseurs*, the only path open was an extremely narrow pass which joined two level spaces; this pass ran along the side of the mountain like a forbidding balcony, hung over a gorge of immense depth.

It was not wide enough for two horsemen abreast, and that beneath the unerring fire of the Kabyles on the heights. The least slip, the first false step, would send one rolling into infinite space. Vaudras saw this conformation, and, understanding its horror, his face blanched, and he shut his eyes. The troopers paused in astonishment, and the smoking horses panted heavily, and receded, necks thrust over cruppers. Evidently the Kabyles had known of that natural redoubt; the women and children were hidden behind the rocks in the rear, and the men were on their knees, or on their breasts, sheltered from balls by great blocks of granite. They held the mountain, and could fire at their pleasure upon the soldiers in the open. Moreover, there was the ravine, the threatening fall.

The French soldiers thrust their heads forward to gaze at the abyss, saying by their grimaces: "If we were birds, now—"

Suddenly the bugler, a little scamp of twenty years old at the utmost, spurred his horse forward in bravado, and sounded the charge. The signal was given, the horses started of their own accord, and along the whole extent of the menacing pass, head flush with tails before them, the first squad dashed splendidly, under a furious fusillade. Only one man, restraining his horse with both hands—only one man, rigid as if petrified in his saddle, remained behind it as rear-guard.

It was Vaudras.

One, two, four, five, twenty; the troopers thundered past him, shaking their heads under that hurricane of balls, but laughing and encouraging one another with shouts. The sub-lieutenant remained immovable, with his eyes fixed on the summit, a cold sweat running off his temples.

Vaudras was smitten with vertigo.

To be attacked by vertigo is almost as bad as to go mad outright. The horror of it suffocates and paralyses; and the man predisposed by temperament to that mysterious potency of empty space, to that magnetic attraction from abysses, loses all consciousness of himself

and all will power; he pales, he trembles, he recedes, and flies from the mute summons of the invisible death awaiting him in the air.

Vaudras was afraid.

Ah! the battle! there is the powder which laughs, the lead which whistles, the steel which darts, the blood which flows, the splendid shocks, the noisy death at will! But that great mouth, silent, terrific, waiting to suck one in—no!—no!—no! impossible! never!

Thirty men had passed, had taken the lead of Vaudras, they fancied that their officer, for the best of reasons, doubtless, watched their tragic defile, and would follow, to place himself at their head again. None noted his appearance, none suspected his anguish. The "little one" afraid! Bah! "Mademoiselle" Vaudras nervous! Indeed, that is enough to terrify. What is the matter? "My lady sub-lieutenant is crying!"

Forty men had gone forward; the balls whistled harshly, scratching the granite walls with terrible rebounds. The Kabyles were firing volleys, continual discharges, sure that they were lost if the charging foes should reach them. Vaudras was exposing himself as a target uselessly.

All the fifty men had passed by him. He remained alone. He dismounted, meaning to try the pass on foot; his horse broke from him, and hurled itself after the others; at a quarter the length of the trail, its shoes slipped on the rock, it lost its footing, and was whirled into the abyss, its four hoofs turned upward. Vaudras screamed, his eyes starting from their sockets. He threw himself upon his knees, he dragged himself upon his stomach, but brute instinct drew him backwards. He *could not go on*.

At that moment, he saw his men surrounded on all sides by the Kabyles, three times their number, rendered desperate by their danger. The women and children sallied from their rock-crannies, and hung themselves from the bridles, they plunged knives into the bellies of the horses, they scratched, they bit, they threw stones.

In that swarming of the horde, that entanglement, that furious grasp of the raving multitude, the *chasseurs*, suffocated, dragged down, felt their limbs grow numb. Their bleeding bodies were drenching the earth with red, and their leader was not there to inspire them, to ordain a victory!

It was faring ill with them. Their long sabres, dulled and bent, were withdrawn with difficulty from their thrusts into the masses. Their arms were weak and broken. They were powder-burned—at such close range were the Kabyles firing. They were deafened by the shrieks of the children, by the howls of the women, by the roars of the men; cut, bitten, bleeding, scorched on all sides, the little troop melted slowly before the multitude which assailed unceasingly. Sally, ambuscade, be the attack of what ilk it might, it meant defeat and death to the French cavalrymen.

Vaudras once more started to run forward, and with his mouth foaming, he fell back once more—the last time. From afar, he gazed with an infinite tenderness upon his men, dying there without him—but, ah! in dying, they were fighting bravely—slaying gallantly. He drew his pistol from his belt, he held it against his temple, he pressed the trigger, and the last convulsions of the death-agony precipitated his corpse into that bottomless abyss which had brought upon him the accursed vertigo.

Stazzemsko the Moujik.

It is morning. The little moujik Stazzemsko arises, very drowsy yet. The pigeons, cooing, brush their wings lightly against the roof of yellow straw. The horses snort impatiently over their mangers. The moujik pulls on a pair of trousers of Lesghis cloth, wraps his feet with the onouchi, four bands of red wool folded crosswise, and, to complete his costume, puts on the schouba, the comfortable schouba, very long and very warm, which cost two roubles and a year's harvesting of honey.

Keivkine, his wife before God, sleeps stretched out upon the great tiled stove. He playfully touches her nose, then each cheek, and finally wakens her and says: "I am going to the city to your father's house to get what you have asked of me—two jars filled with mares' milk, and a flute one tone higher than cousin Serkow's, and a fat sheep for you to roast at Easter."

And the little moujik, after the manner of a fond husband, begins teasing his wife. He pats her gently on the forehead, on the cheek, then on the neck and pretty shoulders. "I am going to take our little one, Popow, with me," he says. "The air is cool and bracing, the journey will be good for him. I will take up little Popow, it will wake him up!" And the moujik laughed merrily.

A worthy man is the moujik, a shoemaker by trade. He goes regularly to church, swears not, never omits the sign of the cross in passing a funeral. He gives thanks at night for the day's blessings, and his faithful soul knows well that although he feeds his horse, and puts on its harness, it is the Lord who leads it.

He now awakens his son. Popow rubs his eyes with his chubby fist, and cries a little before knowing what is wanted of him. The moujik, assuming a gruff tone, says:

"I am going to the city to get some mares' milk, a flute, and a sheep. Who wants to go with me?"

"I," cried Popow.

Then the father takes up the child, places him astride his shoulders, and descends to the stable. There he yokes up his carriage, a well-made vehicle with fine axle-trees, high wheels, and traces of leather, to which the horses are buckled.

And now the day breaks, a fresh, lilac-coloured dawn spreading afar over the land.

Both Stazzemsko and little Popow are seated comfortably in the carriage, well covered up, and the moujik grasps the reins, calling back to the baba: "I will bring you the milk, the sheep, and the flute to-night."

They are off. The baba watches them anxiously as they disappear. "If only the snow did not catch them on the way—if only Popow be not cold—if only the horses be swift!"

Silent, she turns back to the house, burns a taper before a sacred picture, kneels, and sings these verses:

"God will protect those who live in fear of Him. The spirit of the Lord is a divine lamp which reveals all that is false in the heart of man. It is for us to prepare our soul, for Him to govern our tongue. Let us observe the law."

Father and son meanwhile are riding through fields, plains and valleys, and Popow is questioning the moujik. He is eight years old. He is wise.

"Papa, what is mares' milk for?"

"For the baba if she should be sick."

"Papa, what is the sheep for?"

"For the festival of Easter; the family must eat."

"Papa, what is the flute for?"

"To make the bees swarm; they are like simple-minded people—they listen to music."

Popow was satisfied. He is of a curious and thoughtful turn of mind. Beneath that shock of golden hair flying in the wind are grave thoughts, and these grave thoughts must be happy ones, since they make the child smile.

"I will drink some mares' milk; I will suck the fat from the bones of the sheep; I will play on the flute."

But the moujik urges on his black horses: "Up, my little father! On, my little dove!"

And the two black horses seem to fly over the ground. They leave behind them the roads, the ditches, the hills, the brooks, the high hedges of trees. And, behold, the great steppe spreads out before them—like a sea.

The pace becomes more rapid, but steadier. Nothing, neither ruts nor stones, will now impede the smooth movements of the wheels. The lilac-hued dawn rises higher, the sun appears, and Popow claps his hands, shouting: "Good! 'tis day!"

To amuse the child the moujik softly sings the Pliassoväia, a song of exile and poverty, a popular satire:

"From the north pole to the south pole, no place for us, no place!

The police are ever vigilant.

The hangman has a green eye.

Ai, ai, Tra-ra-rai, ai.

Virgin! but his eye is green!"

"Who are you singing against?" asks Popow amazed.

"Against the lords, the masters of the soil."

"The soil?"

"Yes, the land."

Popow does not understand. He asks absently:

"It has masters, the land?"

But the moujik whips up his horses and cries furiously: "Kss! kss! little demons!"

And turning towards his son:

"The poor do not plead, the rich reply harshly."

"And we, papa, are we rich or poor?"

"Half-way between the two," answers the moujik simply.

It is noon. They arrive at the great city. The father-in-law is pleased. He makes them drink a bowl of tea, offers them cake and game, and gives the moujik a Daghestan pipe, and Popow a porcelain figure of a Cossack thrusting out his tongue. He inquires how shoes are selling, if the supply of honey is good, if the baba is well.

"The baba is not only well, but doubly well."

And Popow does not understand why the two men whisper to each other laughing.

Finally the moujik says:

"I have come for two jars of mares' milk."

"Here they are."

"Also a fat sheep."

"I sold the last this morning."

"And also a flute."

"I have three of them; take your choice."

The moujik tries the three flutes, takes the one which makes the loudest sound. Then together they walk out into the broad streets. They look at the pretty women reclining on the cushions of their carriages, the fine shops, the people who are speaking French in the street, and when they have gazed at all these things, the moujik finally says, in a decided tone: "It is time to go."

"Well, son-in-law, God be with you."

Father and son are again traversing the fields, plains, valleys, and Popow is still asking questions as in the morning.

"Papa, you have the flute?"

"Yes."

"Do the bees like music?"

"As simple-minded people do," answered Stazzemsko, and he shook the reins.

"Go on, my little father! Go on, my little dove!"

And the two black horses seem to fly over the ground. The pace becomes more rapid.

Eventide in hyacinthine hues spreads over the land, the moon appears, and Popow claps his hands shouting: "Good! 'tis night!"

The moujik softly sings the Pliassovaia:

"From the north pole to the south pole, no place for us, no place!"

"It is beautiful, the darkness!" cries Popow, delighted at the sensation of moving swiftly through the shadows.

And now they had been galloping for two hours. The horned moon is bright. The sweat of the horses rises in vapour about them, glinting in the white light. On they gallop, on and on! Their eight hoofs make but a single flash.

"Kss! kss! little paschal lamb! Kss! kss! dove of my roof!" cries the moujik to his horses.

But now, just below, by the wheel, two white points light near him, and these points of fire follow him, bounding along. The moujik Stazzemsko shudders. But he is braver than a Pandour, stronger than a cannoneer. He lashes the right eye of the wolf with his whip, whereupon the wolf leaves the right side, and bounds to the left. But while the moujik lashes him with his whip, other white points light up at his right side, and, lo! now two wolves are following the carriage. They jump, they fix their eyes on the moujik in silence. Stazzemsko is afraid. He looks out upon the boundless steppe filled with shadows, and as he lowers his eyes he sees not four but thirty points of light gleaming about him.

"Ho! ho! ho! little dove! little father! faster! faster!"

And the excited horses raise higher their iron shoes, stretch their necks forward, panting for breath. So swift is their reaching gallop that they appear longer by half.

"Ho! ho! ho! rai! ra! rai!" screams Stazzemsko.

The moujik rises to his feet, holding the reins taut, his cap on the back of his head, his round eyes staring straight into the night. It is no longer a pack, but a multitude which follows him. He hears their panting, their claws scratching the hard earth.

"Ho! rai! rai! little dove! little father, hie along!"

And the carriage flies, a swiftly moving shadow in the night.

Stazzemsko stands erect like the Tamschtschik, the weird postillion with eyes of flame. He is seized with horror. The wolves seem about to spring upon him, to fasten themselves to his cloak, to bury their fangs in his arms, to leap upon the horses, to cut the reins with their sharp teeth, to tear his son in pieces. And Popow laughs, unconscious of the danger. Now and then he blows in the flute, his eyes turned towards the stars.

"Haou! ho! rai! rai! ho! hou!"

Poor Stazzemsko! He thinks of the baba, the pretty fair-headed baba, who is waiting for them by the stove or before the beehive, of the soup of pearl barley which is steaming upon the dresser, and of the tale he will tell of his journey. But now wolves, wolves, and more wolves, gathering silently, eager for one of the horses to fall. The sharp wind cuts the moujik's face, and pierces to the marrow of his bones.

"Clic! clic!—Hou! ho! rai! rai! ho! hou! clic! clic!"

A wolf has leaped upon the seat, has bitten the moujik's shoe. He utters a sharp cry, seizes the animal by the nostrils, hurls him back, but a spasm of fear pierces Stazzemsko like a sharp pain. He leaps upon the back of one of the horses, and cries in the ears of the faithful beasts: "Faster, lamb! faster, dove! for Popow's sake."

"By the Christ!" suddenly screams Stazzemsko.

A wolf is clinging to the seat. Stazzemsko now springs quickly back into the carriage. He lifts the tilt and looks behind him.

They are a score, three-score, seven-score, ten-score wolves. It is a black ocean swarming with stars, as if the canopy of hell were reflected in the steppe!

And still the moujik's cry: "Ho! rai! rai! ra! rai! ho!"

But he has lost all hope, he is gasping for breath! Popow has let the flute fall, the good flute which the bees love.

"Popow! Popow!" suddenly screams the moujik, with the gestures and cries of a madman.

"What, papa?" murmurs the child.

"Popow! Popow!" sobs the father.

"O, papa! what did you say?"

"Popow! Popow! you see the wolves?"

"Yes, papa, yes!"

"They are going to kill us!"

"No, papa, if the bees like the music, the wolves—"

But these are his last words! Suddenly the moujik seizes his child by the throat, lifts him on high, and with an awful blasphemy hurls the child into the midst of the wolves!

A strangled cry. The dark moving pack stops—stops for a moment. The carriage glides swiftly on.

Now it has passed the steppe. The horses slacken their pace. They enter the darkened, sleeping village but the baba, the pretty blonde baba, waits by the gate.

"Well, Stazz, dear Stazz, hast thou had a peaceful journey? Was Popow cold? Did the horses go well?"

But the moujik answers not.

He plays upon the flute, laughing long and loud, a strange shuddering laugh, for his mind is dead to all things.



"My dear fellow, I tell you it's an absolute certainty. The mare is as bound to win as water's bound to run down hill. There's nothing else in it with her; it's a dead snip, and I've backed my opinion by putting every sovereign I can raise on it. If you are wise, you'll do the same."

"Yes, it's a very good thing I've no doubt, but for all that it's a terrible risk, you know. I don't mean that it isn't good enough as a bet, for I believe myself that May Queen will have a walk over, but then you must remember that I should be risking a lot more than what I staked."

"What do you mean? I don't see how you can lose more than you put on."

"But I should lose a great deal more than that, I can assure you. Of course this is strictly between ourselves, and so I don't mind telling you that the old gentleman has rehabilitated me and set me once more, and for the last time, in the pathways of respectability, but upon very stringent conditions."

Frank Yorke, *roué*, clubman, man-about-town, living one-fourth on a private income of five hundred a year and three-fourths on his wits, looked at his friend, Percy Savil, a rather weak-faced man nearly ten years his junior, with a sarcastic pretence of approbation, as he replied:

"I'm delighted to hear it, and I hope I may congratulate you upon having reformed for a very substantial consideration."

Savil laughed, not altogether pleasantly, and said:

"Not very substantial and not very pleasant as to

conditions. Briefly it stands this way. You know how terribly put out the governor was about my marriage, and I must confess the experiment of marrying a girl off the variety boards has not been a conspicuous success.

"Still, I think he'd have got over that in time if it hadn't been for my confounded bad luck with horses and cards. He's paid up three or four times, as you know, and now he has given me what he calls the last chance, and as the governor's a man of his word I believe it is the last. He has given me £500 in cash and got me a berth as assistant secretary to a small syndicate which makes pots of money in working out other people's inventions, very much to the advantage of the syndicate. My father is a big shareholder and a director of this concern, and that's how he got me there.

"I'm to have five hundred a year and I shall have to earn it. If I stick to work and go steadily everything else is to be forgotten and when the old gentleman dies I shall come in for the Berkshire estate and about seven thousand a year, just as if I had been the best of only sons.

"But, if he finds that I have made a single bet, or put a single sovereign on a horse, or in any way indulged what he calls my pernicious craze for gambling, I shall get the sack from the syndicate, and be disinherited into the bargain. Now do see how much I should lose supposing I put money that I don't possess on May Queen and she didn't win?"

"But you told me just now that the governor had given you five hundred in cash. Haven't you any of it left?"

"Precious little. It was all owed before I got it. There was that hundred to D'Arcy, a couple of hundred to those Jew lawyers who run the Metropolitan Bank as a money-lending concern at sixty per cent., and the other two hundred just about sufficed to keep the most noisy of my creditors quiet for a bit."

"H'm, that's a pity! If you only had that five hundred now and could put it on May Queen at six to one it would be as good as three thousand in your pocket, and three thousand is not to be sneezed at, you know, by a man with your tastes who has to live on five hundred a year, and earn it. If it wasn't such an absolute certainty I wouldn't for a moment advise you to take the plunge under the circumstances, but I know how unfortunate you've been, and the information that

I have had is so exclusive and so perfectly reliable that I thought it was only friendly to pass it on to you."

"Yes," replied Savil, as the voice of the tempter sank into his weak, undisciplined soul. "It's very kind of you, old man, and that three thousand would be the salvation of me, for the moment that it gets known that I'm drawing a regular income the duns would be down on me like a flock of vultures and I shall have either to reduce myself to the wages of a clerk to pay them off, or I shall be worried to death with judgments, and similar inventions of the law and the evil one. I daren't tell the governor about all of them for reasons that you will appreciate after what I have told you."

Yorke smiled and nodded, and he went on, staring blankly out of the club room in which they were sitting.

"Still I must confess that it's a great temptation. Three thousand would more than clear the lot off and then I could start square. I suppose there is no way of doing it so that even if she lost my name wouldn't appear in the business. Could you put it on for me in your name?"

"I would with the greatest pleasure, old man, but my book's full on Ascot, and between you and me the bookies know that I've got on all I can lose, and if I went for another five hundred they'd want me to put the money down, and that's not what you want. But as your father has settled up for you, and as you've got a decent appointment, I'm sure Dobson would take the bet from you if you could put down ten per cent. I suppose you could get that together?"

"Oh, yes, I could manage that," replied Savil. "You're right, it is too good a thing to throw away; I'll risk it."

"Bravo!" said Yorke. "That's like your old pluck. I like to see a man stand up to his misfortunes, and you can feel perfectly safe—May Queen is as certain to win the Ascot Cup as the sun is to rise to-morrow morning, so we may as well go and split a bottle to her success and your better fortunes."

There are some men who cannot go straight, and Percy Savil, only son of Sir Percy Savil, Baronet, of Trenton Abbey in Berkshire, and director of the Patents' Operating Syndicate, Coleman Street, E.C., was one of them. He had had every chance that his father could give him, and he had made a mess of them all.

Finally he had married a pretty, rather vulgar girl, perfectly respectable, and off the boards equally insipid, and this had led to the old gentleman first sending him out of the house and then cutting him off with less than a shilling, which he could do permanently if he chose, as the estate was not entailed, and his fortune was absolutely at his own disposal.

As has been seen, he had relented to a certain extent, as fathers are wont to do, but this was really the last chance that Percy would ever have, and he did with it as he had done with the rest. He was a gambler, heart and soul, and for such there is no hope.

Still if he could have had any idea of the depths to which this last act of wickedness and folly was to take him, short of money as he was, he would have thrown the fifty pounds into the Thames and consented to live on the barest pittance till his father's death rather than have paid the ten per cent. deposit to the bookmaker Dobson as he did on the day following the evening of his conversation with Yorke.

Frank Yorke's confidence in the May Queen was so far justified that a week before the race the odds had

decreased from four to one to seven to four. With a last inspiration of good, Savil tried to hedge and save himself. But the Fates were against him. He had no money to deposit and he could find no one who would take the bet on credit. The day of the race came, he won about a hundred pounds through Yorke on one or two minor races, and May Queen was beaten for the Cup by half a head.

The race was run on Tuesday. On the following Monday he would have to pay £450 or he would be posted at Tattersall's and nothing could prevent his father finding out that he had broken the compact, and this would mean immediate ruin and future disinheritance. In the ordinary course of events he had about as much chance of paying the £450 as he had of materially reducing the National Debt. His credit among his own associates was gone, he dare not go to his father, the Jews would have laughed at him, and there was an end of it.

To say that he looked upon his position as desperate would be to describe his state of mind very inadequately. He was something more than desperate. He was in that state of mind in which a man is not only reckless as regards himself but completely careless as to any consequences that he may bring upon other people. It is a curious fact that when people are in this condition they usually have opportunities for making bad worse, and so it turned out with Percy Savil.

He got through his work at the office of the Syndicate in some sort of fashion the day after the race, and that evening he met Yorke by appointment and went to have, as he called it, a final flutter before the smash came. He had somewhere about a hundred pounds with him and the two went to a snug little private club, of which they were both members, not a mile from the centre of Piccadilly Circus, where unlawful games of chance were the rule and stakes were limited only by the purse or the discretion of the players.

"I expect a fellow to call at the club to-night," said Yorke as soon as they were seated in a hansom, "who ought to be a fit and proper person to give you your revenge against the Fates. He is a young American named, absurdly enough, Nasmyth P. Vansyller, but young and apparently simple, and absolutely wallowing in dollars. He had also a taste for poker, a game which you ought to know pretty well by this time, and I think instead of plunging with the other fellows at baccarat or roulette we had better arrange a quite little poker party in the small drawing-room, and get Mr. Vansyller to join us."

"All right," said Savil with the carelessness of a man who knows that he has only one more card to play. "That will suit me better than the other. I don't much care about absolute, blind chance for my last fling; I've had quite enough of it, but at poker, I think I ought to be able to relieve Mr. Vansyller of some of his dollars before morning."

So he did, but not at all in the manner he had in his mind when he spoke.

Mr. Vansyller, a young man of about four-and-twenty and apparently a representative specimen of the American parody on the English gilded youth, arrived at the club, sent up his card to Yorke, and was duly introduced, and made free of the premises for the evening.

The poker party was a great success, for Mr. Frank Yorke and Mr. Nasmyth P. Vansyller. Percy Savil, by dint of good nerve and better fortune, multiplied his hundred by five within the first two hours of the

game. If he had stopped then there would have been no need to tell this story, but he didn't. The gambling madness was aroused within him, and he forgot all about the dangers of his position, and the duty that he owed to himself and his father.

He went on, thinking of nothing but the cards and the possibilities attached to their combinations, and the result was that by two a.m. he was cleaned out even to the last half-crown, while Yorke was £250 to the good and Mr Vansyller had displayed a grip of the game and a pluck and pertinacity in seeing his opponents out which had been very little expected of him, and which had resulted in the accumulation of the pile of notes and gold in front of him amounting to very nearly a thousand pounds.

Then the party broke up. Savil, sullen and callous to everything now that everything was lost, bade a hasty "Good-night" all round and started off to walk home to his house in Westbourne Terrace partly because he wanted to argue the matter over once more with himself, but chiefly because he hadn't as much in his pocket as would pay the cab fare. His head was aching savagely and all his nerves were tingling with the excitement of the game on which he had staked everything and lost.

The farther he went the darker and more hopeless his position seemed to be. There was not a ray of hope to be seen in any direction. In a few days he would not only be dishonoured according to the code of his kind but he would be ruined and disinherited as well.

By the time he got to the Marble Arch he had come to the conclusion that the future was not worth facing. He stopped and thought of the Serpentine away yonder behind the trees of the park.

Surely it would be better for him to drop into the water off the bridge and be done with it all than to drag out a miserable existence of poverty and discredit in which he would sink lower and lower as he went on until after all he would probably come to the same end, for he knew himself well enough to know that he was the last man in the world to wrest fortune out of misfortune by dint of sheer hard work.

He turned into the park and started off down the broad path which leads across to the Magazine. The night was dark and he strode along with his hands deep in his pockets and his chin on his breast. He never expected to meet anyone there at that time of night, but by the time he had covered two-thirds of the distance he ran squarely into someone, and heard a voice with a distinct Bostonian drawl say:

"Hello, sir! I should have thought this road was about wide enough for two to get past. You ought to keep a brighter look out a dark night like this."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," stammered Savil, stooping to pick up his hat which had fallen off in the collision. "Why, Mr. Vansyller, is it you? What on earth are you doing here at this time of night?"

"I might ask you the same, Mr. Savil," replied the American a little more politely than he had spoken before. "What I'm doing here is trying to find myself, for I'm lost. You see I took a cab from Piccadilly Circus and told the fellow to drive me to Victoria Hotel down yonder in Brompton, while I ought to have told him to go to the Great Western at Paddington."

"I don't know whether I got too much champagne inside me at the club or what it was, but I clean forgot that I'd ordered my traps to be sent over to the Great Western this afternoon because I'm going down West to Plymouth and round there first thing in the morning."

"I remembered this by the time I got to the corner of the park, and as I had a bit of a head on me I thought a walk wouldn't do me any harm, so I got down and started out to find the Marble Arch, and now I don't know where I am."

"Fool of a thing to do, wasn't it, considering I've got about a thousand pounds in this bag which I bought from the steward of the club to carry the plunder in?"

Savil saw at a glance that the American, though not drunk, had drunk quite enough champagne to make him talkative and careless. He looked at the bag which he could just see dimly in the darkness. There was a thousand pounds in notes and gold inside it—more than enough to repair all that he had lost, to redeem his position in the present, and to insure him riches and a title in the future.

It was a strong temptation, and he was in no state of mind to resist it. A plan instantly took shape in his mind as though some evil spirit had put it there complete.

He laughed good-humouredly and said.

"Well, do you know, I was doing very much the same thing, only I haven't lost myself. You're a good way from the Marble Arch and those are the only gates open on that side, but as I may as well go back now if you'll come with me I'll soon put you in the way of getting a cab in Oxford Street and then you will be at the Great Western in ten minutes."

"Good for you," said Vansyller. "Very kind of you indeed. I shall be most obliged to you. I began to get a bit skeery all alone here in this place with all this money about me."

"Oh! that'll be all right," said Savil. "Come along; this way."

They turned back together, and Savil took the first turning to the left, leading in the direction of Kensington Gardens. He knew the park thoroughly, and he took this path because he had determined by fair means or foul to have enough of the contents of the bag to save him from the ruin to which he had chosen death as a preferable alternative.

He determined to try fair means first and bringing the conversation round to the night's play and his losses he unbosomed himself to the American and put his whole position before him, winding up by asking him point-blank to lend him £500 out of his winnings.

Vansyller refused in no more words than it took him to say that he was not accustomed to lend large sums of money to casual acquaintances. A few pounds for present requirements, but five hundred—"That's two thousand dollars, you know," as he put it—was laying it on a lot too thick, and he was not the sort of man to do it.

Savil choked back his rage and disappointment, said that it didn't matter very much, as at the worst he would be able to get it from his father, and turned the subject off, with an apology for troubling him with his private affairs.

Then they tramped on through the darkness towards the Gardens until they reached a dark and lonely spot under the trees. Savil had taken a long-bladed, buck-horn handled pocket-knife from his waistcoat and opened it in his great coat pocket.

"This Marble Arch seems an almighty long way off," said Vansyller, somewhat alarmed to see the gloom growing deeper and deeper the farther they went.

"We're not far off it now," said Saville, pointing ahead. "Look, you can see the point of it through those trees."

The American leant forward, peering in the direction

pointed out. The next moment Savil's left arm was round his throat, choking back the cry that rose to his lips, and before he could make a struggle in self defence the thin, sharp blade of the knife was buried in his heart.

It was a very small wound and the bleeding was almost entirely internal. There was a seat close by under one of the trees, and Savil, leaving the knife in the wound, to keep the murdered man's clothes against it, dragged the body to it and put it in a sitting posture propped up against one of the arms.

Then he opened the bag, emptied several handfuls of gold into his pockets, pried out the largest notes he could find in the dark, and then, closing the bag, he put it beside his body and strode off rapidly towards the Marble Arch. He managed to get out of the park unobserved and made the best of his way home. He had purposely left the knife behind him, because it was not his, but one that he had picked up in a railway carriage two days before, and as no one knew he had it, it could furnish no clue against him.

As he was occupying just then a separate room from his wife on account of one of many quarrels, no one knew what time he got home. He counted the money that he had become a murderer to get, and found that he had got a little over £550. He locked it away safely, drank half a tumblerful of neat brandy, and got into bed—not to sleep, but to enact the tragedy in the park over and over again till daylight, and then at last he fell asleep to dream of it.

He went to the office as usual that day, and, coming back in the evening, he saw on the placards of the evening papers: "Murder and Robbery in Hyde Park. An Arrest." He bought a paper at Aldersgate Street, and while he was waiting for his train read the news which possessed such a terrible interest for him.

Stripped of its sensational garnishing it came to this. An American gentleman of wealth, named Nasmyth P. Vansyller, had been found on a seat under the trees near Kensington Gardens with the large blade of an ordinary pocket-knife buried in his heart. A small handbag, containing but a few loose coins, was found beside him.

Soon after daybreak that morning the police on duty at the Marble Arch had arrested a man named James Fordham, a mechanic out of work, on suspicion of robbery. As this man was going out of the park it was noticed that he was holding his pockets very carefully, as

though he had something hidden in them. A policeman stopped him on suspicion, and as he did so the man started back in a fright, and a sovereign dropped down the leg of his ragged trousers, evidently from a hole in his pocket.

He was at once searched, and notes and gold to the amount of over £400 were found upon him. While he was at the police station to which he had been taken, news of the finding of the dead body came, and a charge of murder was added to that of robbery. Thereupon the man confessed that he had been sleeping all night in the park and, starting to come out at daybreak, he had seen a gentleman apparently sitting asleep on a seat with a bag beside him.

He thought he was drunk, and curiosity made him look into the bag. He saw the money in it, and, having been out of work, and nearly starving, for six weeks, he had been overcome by the temptation and had taken it. He, however, strenuously denied the charge of murder, and protested that he knew nothing more than what he had told.

Later on in the day a Mr. Frank Yorke, from whom a note of invitation was found on the body of the murdered man, had been communicated with. He at once attended and identified the body, and recognised the numbers of some of the notes. He said the notes were part of a large sum that Mr. Vansyller had won at cards the night before. The accused was taken before the magistrate, charged with murder and robbery, and stood remanded to the following day.

Although, in one sense the fact that the murderer bade fair to be fastened upon someone else was a momentary relief to Savil's mind, the identification of the notes by Yorke completely confounded him

and brought home to him the horrible conviction that he had stained his hands with blood for nothing.

He dare not venture to cash the notes that he had, for fear they would be identified, and this would leave him nearly £300 short of the sum which he intended to tell Yorke he had received from his father on making full confession of his lapse and giving him his oath that he would never gamble again.

As soon as he got home he put the notes in the fire. This left him over £200 in gold. At first he thought of flying the country, but this plan he dismissed very soon, for not only was the amount wholly insufficient for such a purpose, but his flight would bring immediate suspicion upon him.



Savil's left arm was round his throat.

He saw now what a fatal error he had made in not taking all the money and the bag as well, for there was sure to be a searching inquiry into the cause of the difference between what Vansyller was known to have had with him and the amount that had been found on Fordham. If he had only taken it all and sunk the bag in the Serpentine, whether anyone had been arrested for the murder or not, the fate of the bag and the money would have remained a mystery.

Now he dare not even spend the gold that he had in paying a portion of his racing debts, for, to his morbidly excited mind that would immediately excite suspicion against him, and if any inquiries at all were made as to how he got it, a few lines from Yorke to his father would prove instantly that he had not had it from him.

The next day, James Fordham was brought up on remand and committed for trial on the capital charge. His statement had been wholly disbelieved and the only mystery about the case seemed to be what had become of the rest of the money. A new horror was now added to Savil's mental misery. It seemed almost certain that an innocent man would suffer for the crime which he had committed with so little result, and thus he would have the blood of two instead of one upon his soul.

As the fatal Monday came rapidly nearer, with its inevitable ruin and exposure, his misery began to degenerate into madness, and his thoughts turned once more to suicide. He had nothing to live for. Why should he let an innocent man be hanged for him, when his own life was no use to him?

On the Friday night he made up his mind to do the only act of justice he could do and then end his life. He sat down and wrote a full confession, describing why and how he had committed the crime, and what he had done with the money. He put this in a blue envelope, addressed it to the Magistrate of the Marylebone Police Court, and put it in the drawer of his writing-table.

The next day as he was going to the City he took with him a prescription for some morphia and strychnine pills which his doctor had prescribed for him some months before. He had these made up at three or four different chemists, and so obtained enough to poison him with certainty. It was his intention to go home after office hours, post the confession, which he had not dared to carry about with him for fear of an accident, and then poison himself.

He had scarcely taken his place in the office when a telegram was brought to him. He opened it, glanced at the few words which it contained, and then ordered the boy out of the room in a voice scarcely recognisable as his own, and dropped forward on his desk with his face buried in his hands, sobbing out:

"My God! I've done it all for nothing."

The telegram was to tell him that his father had died suddenly of apoplexy, shortly after six that evening, and this meant that he was master of the Berkshire estate and £7,000 a year.

The first thing he did after regaining a little self

possession was to get into a hansom and drive off home as fast as he could to destroy the confession. Life was very different now; it was worth living, and the poor wretch of a mechanic might swing for him! What

did he, Sir Percy Savil, of Trenton Abbey, care for that?

When he reached home he went to his room, took out his keys and put one into the keyhole of the drawer into which he had put the fatal document. It was unlocked, for in his distraction he had forgotten to lock it. With the beads of perspiration standing out upon his brow, he dragged the drawer open. The blue envelope was gone, and in its place lay a note scribbled in pencil by his wife. With trembling hand he picked

it up from the drawer and read it:

I have long known that you were a fool and a brute, and I have just learnt that you are a murderer. I will not betray you, unless the man who is charged with the murder is found guilty, but I will live under the same roof with you no longer. Don't follow me, or find out where I am, at your peril.

KATE.

With a cry of fury almost like the howl of a wild beast he sprang from the chair and began pacing up and down the room. Only two thoughts were clear in his distracted mind: he must at once go to Trenton, and he must get the confession back at any price, and all risks, but he must go to Trenton first. That was inevitable and he went.

Four days later he had buried his father and was Sir Percy Savil of Trenton. The next day he returned to town and put a skilful private detective on the track of his wife. After a week of agonising suspense, he received a note from this man to say that his wife under her old stage name, Miss Kate Nelson, had taken an engagement to go to America, and would leave for Liverpool the next day. He had inclosed her London address.

That was the day of the trial of Fordham at the Old Bailey, and there was not an hour to be lost. So determined to make one desperate effort to recover the confession from his wife, he got into a cab and drove off to his wife's lodgings in an obscure street off Essex Road, Islington. She was not in when he got there, but he gave a false name, saying that he had called on urgent theatrical business, and asked to be allowed to wait, as she was expected in in about an half-an-hour.

He waited an hour, and then she came. As she opened the door and saw him, she staggered back in such undisguised horror, that his blood rose in ungovernable fury in an instant.

"What have you come here for?" she said. "Didn't I tell you that you would follow me at your peril?"

"You know what I've come for," he said hoarsely, "And I'm going to have it before I go away."

She made a motion as though to turn and leave the room, but he was too quick for her. He had risen as he spoke and crossed the room, with three long swift strides. He saw her mouth open to scream, and like a flash his hand darted out and was clasped over her lips. Then with the other he seized her by the back of the



Dropped forward on his desk, with his face buried in his hands.

neck, and held her powerless either to move or utter a sound. He pulled her back against the door and shut it with his foot. Then he hissed in her ear:

"Now utter a sound above your breath and it shall be the last you'll ever make. I've something to live for now, and I'm going to live. Give me that confession quietly and you shall have two thousand a year for life. Refuse, and I'll kill you. Now which will you have?"

He took his hand from her mouth and waited for her reply. She didn't scream or make any attempt to leave the room, but she looked at him with eyes burning with hate, and said in a voice that trembled with a passion almost equal to his own:

"You hound, to strike me like that! Haven't you ill-treated me enough already? Why couldn't you let me go to America without seeing your face again? No, I won't give you your confession, and I've a good mind to hang you, you brute, for you're not fit to live.

"Get out of the room, and never come near me again. Send me the two thousand a year, and as long as you send it you shall be safe, always supposing they don't hang Fordham. This is the day of the trial, you know."

She spoke the last words in a bitter, taunting tone which turned his anger into absolute madness. He sprang at her again, and caught her by the throat. As he did so she picked up a dinner knife that was lying on the table which had been laid for supper. She made a stab at his face with this, but he parried the blow, and in a moment he had wrested the knife out of her hand, and, still holding her by the throat, with his left hand he lifted the knife and said:

"Now. Which is it, for the last time—the confession or this?"

At the sight of the threatening steel her nerve failed her, and with trembling lips and in a half-choked voice she stammered:

"I can't give it you, Percy, because I haven't got it."

"What?" he shouted. "You've sent it, have you? Curse you, take that," and before she could say another word the knife was buried deep in her throat.

She dropped to the floor almost without a groan, but she was not dead, for when he stooped over her, overcome with a sudden revulsion of horror at what he had done in the moment of blind passion, and tried to staunch the blood that was flowing from the wound in her neck, she looked up at him and said in a weak voice, half choked by the internal bleeding of the wound:

"You fool! I never meant to hang you, and I couldn't have done, for I burnt the confession when I found it. I didn't want to be pointed out as a murderer's wife, and I knew you'd be rich some day. But you won't now for you'll hang for this."

Then her head fell back, there was a rattle in her throat, and after a few convulsive struggles for breath she was dead.

Sir Percy Savil did not hang for either of his murders, although he saw that there was no escape from the consequence of his last crime. He had his pills still in his pocket, for he had carried them ever since he bought them.

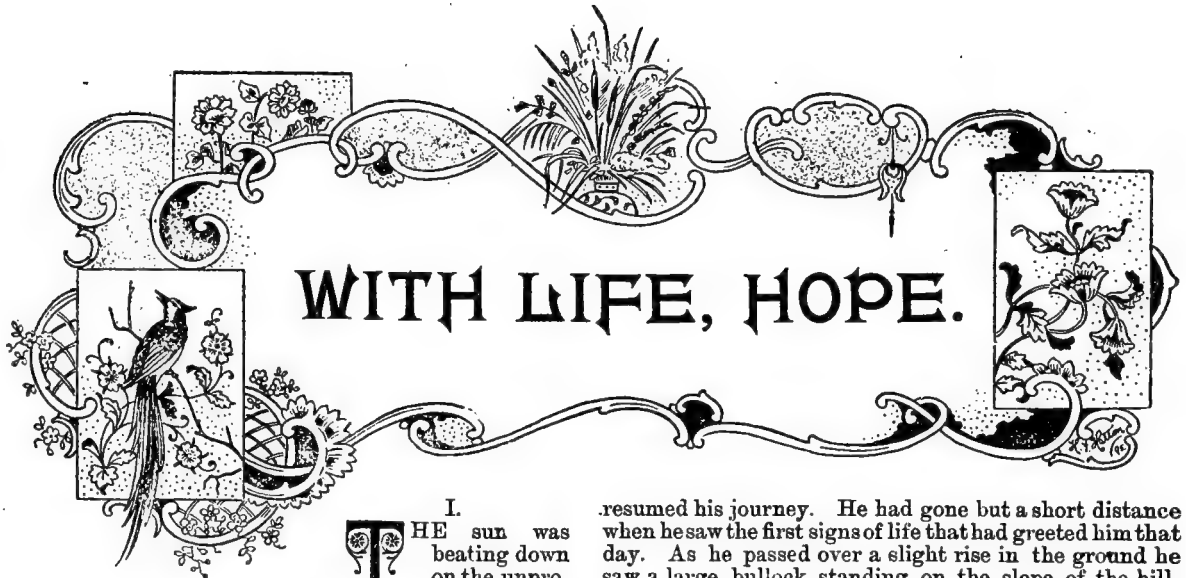
He emptied the box into his mouth, took a gulp of water from a bottle on the table, and walked out into the street and gave himself up to the first policeman he saw, confessing both the murders to him there and then. As the astonished man took him into custody, wondering whether he was mad or not, a boy came running down the street with a flaring placard with the words in big red letters: "Hyde Park Murder. Verdict and Sentence."

"They won't hang him now, will they?" said Savil to the policeman.

"Not if what you've told me's true," replied the man. And they didn't.

GEORGE GRIFFITH.





WITH LIFE, HOPE.

I.
THE sun was beating down on the unprotected earth. The defenceless soil smoked and quivered under his continued rays, its sides parched and cracked open. The streams murmured in subdued tones, the crickets creaked a dismal refrain.

Only one adventurous mortal was braving the tropical noonday heat. Slowly he toiled over the low, rolling hills, their sides bronzed with exposure, unprotected as they were by tree or shrub. No green thing in sight to rest the eyes from the glare of dried earth and grass; nothing to relieve save the hazy and uncertain outlines of the distant hills, that danced like a will-o'-the-wisp in the smoky atmosphere. The hot air scorched his nostrils as he inhaled it, and then came back from his lungs with increased heat; his face was dry and burned, and through the gaping pores no grateful moisture came. Yet on he strode, with steady swinging pace, as if heat and cold were alike indifferent to him.

He was indeed well calculated to withstand the buffets of the weather or the fiercer attacks of his fellow men. More than six feet in height, his broad shoulders and well-proportioned figure made him seem much shorter, and his easy, graceful movements evidenced a control of every muscle that could come only from constant active exercise. A long, reddish blonde beard covered his face, which was bronzed by exposure almost to the colour of his beard, and his long hair fell in waves upon his shoulders. His whole appearance was striking, yet the most striking feature was his piercing blue eyes, which seemed to look you through and through, and announced plainly that their owner could not shirk from danger or hardship in whatever form it might come.

His costume was that of a hunter, and indicated—as did his small cap, made of the skin of an animal, even more strongly—that its purpose was to withstand a much colder climate than that which he was now experiencing. Upon his back was slung a well-fashioned rifle.

II.

PAUSING on the crest of a small hill he glanced around him towards the distant line of hills, and then, turning his course towards their nearest point, he

resumed his journey. He had gone but a short distance when he saw the first signs of life that had greeted him that day. As he passed over a slight rise in the ground he saw a large bullock standing on the slope of the hill. The animal saw him at the same moment, and turning towards him stood looking at the intruder. Soon several more appeared, regarding him attentively, and then the whole band began moving slowly across his path, about a hundred yards in front of him.

Pushing on his course he paid no attention to them, until they again attracted his notice by the peculiarity of their actions. The whole band of about a hundred cattle were now in sight, and were circling around him with steadily increasing speed. It was evident that he was the object of their attention, and he attempted to frighten them away by shouting and waving his arms, but these efforts were without avail. On the contrary the animals had drawn about him in a circle, and were now approaching nearer and nearer, drawing the circle tighter about him every moment.

He saw that it was practically impossible to break through their line, and yet to stand there and await their attack was certain death. Their long, sharp horns gleamed viciously in the sunlight. Glancing hastily around he sought some tree or rock that might offer some shelter from their attack. But there was none within reach; nothing within that fatal circle to relieve the monotony of the shining slippery grass. There was no time to be lost, for the circle was constantly growing smaller, and the animals becoming more and more closely packed. Quick as thought he formed his plan of action. Unslinging his rifle, he prepared to shoot one of the animals in front of him, hoping in the confusion that would follow to break through the lines and find shelter among some trees at the foot of the hill. Bringing the rifle to his shoulder he prepared to make his single shot as effective as possible.

III.

"Do not shoot! I implore you, do not shoot."

The voice came from behind him, and he turned in surprise in that direction. His astonishment was considerably increased when he saw a horse approaching at full speed, and upon its back a young girl, whose long, black hair, loosened by her riding, was streaming out behind her, while she anxiously urged her horse onward. As he looked, her horse dashed into the

circle, and the nearest cattle were turned and headed down the hillside. With a dexterity that astonished him she "rounded up" the herd, and soon had them all started down the side of the hill after the leaders, and then halted her horse alongside of him.

The situation was an embarrassing one for him, and for once in his life he felt uncomfortable and ill at ease. To require assistance in getting out of a bad scrape was no new experience, but to have the whole matter taken out of his hands, and to be rescued from his peril while he stood idly by was unpleasant; to have this done by a woman was humiliating. He stood looking at her awkwardly, while she sat shyly returning his glance. Indeed, she felt as uncomfortable as he, though he was too confused to notice it. Finally, he recovered himself sufficiently to speak.

"I have to thank you," he said. "They would probably have killed me." There was no trace in his voice of the excitement of the situation from which he had just been rescued.

She looked at him curiously, for evidently his mode of dress puzzled her.

"Where do you come from?" she inquired at length.

The tone of uncertainty and the abruptness of the question discovered to him the fact of her embarrassment and gave him that feeling of superiority that enabled him to regain his self-possession.

"From England originally, but from the Blue Mountains lately," he answered with a smile.

"The Blue Mountains?"

"Yes; you have not heard of them? They are far away to the north of here, many hundred miles. I have travelled alone for many months. Until now I have not seen a human being for weeks."

"But how did you know we lived here?"

"I did not know."

"Then why do you come?"

"I have travelled for pleasure, for curiosity. I wished to see this southern country, where the sun burns you up."

"I do not understand," she said quietly. "Where are you going?"

"I do not know. Anywhere; I am going now to these mountains," pointing to the distant line of hills.

"But you will first come with me? You must rest until it is cooler. Nobody travels here in the heat of the day; it would kill you. You must come and eat with us, and then we can give you a horse to continue your journey, and tell you how to go. Oh! in this heat and this country to think of walking!"

"I thank you, no. I must go on."

"In the heat? You will die. You must come with me. My father and mother will welcome you. I wish you to come."

He looked at her closely for the first time, and then he wondered why he had not noticed her beauty before. She was dark, with that Spanish complexion through which the warm blood showed with a rich colour; heightening the brilliancy of her lustrous black eyes which lighted up her whole face with a tender, trusting expression. Her raven hair hung in masses upon her shoulders. And as she leant forward with a confiding, intreating gesture, he thought he had never seen so beautiful a woman.

"I will come," he said briefly, and as she turned her horse in the direction of her home, he walked on by her side. So they journeyed in silence for a time.

"I must thank you for saving my life," he said, at length. "They would surely have killed me, and you ran a great risk yourself."

"If you had shot at them I could not have turned them away," she answered. "They would have been angry. You should not have walked here; they do not attack one who rides, but when you walk they will kill you."

IV.

BEFORE long they came in sight of the hacienda, a long, low house, upon a flat with neither tree nor shrub near, but upon one side the steep spurs of the range of hills came almost to the house, forming deep cañons.

The old folks received the traveller kindly, listened gravely to the story of his adventure, and then showed him to an apartment in the house where he might rest until his meal was prepared. But he was in no mood to rest. The indolent Spanish customs suited him but ill, for he was unaccustomed to the heat of the weather and the habits that it necessitated. Besides, his mind was far from easy. He was of a quiet disposition naturally, and loved solitude. His impulse, even while prompted by gratitude to the girl for the service she had rendered him, was to retreat from the settlement. But she exercised a strange fascination over him, and, though he would not confess it even to himself, it was to be near her to feast his eyes upon her beauty, that he had accepted her invitation.

It was with a pleasing fiction by which he only half deceived himself, therefore, that he now sought the low verandah in front of the house, "to enjoy the fresh air outside."

"Josefa is preparing a little supper for you," explained the old man as he sat puffing a cigarette.

The stranger seated himself near the door, where he might see the lithe, slender figure of the girl as she flitted about inside, produced a pipe after having refused a proffered cigarette, and was soon entertaining the old man with stories of his adventures among Indians and wild beasts. The Mexican listened gravely, only half understanding the allusions of his guest to unfamiliar localities and customs, yet refraining from asking questions lest he might seem inquisitive about the visitor's antecedents.

Soon Josefa, having finished her preparations, came and stood by her father, and the stranger found fresh enthusiasm for his narrative in her evident admiring interest.

The afternoon shadows lengthened imperceptibly as he continued his reminiscences, and the sun was almost disappearing behind the distant hills, when they sat down to the meal which Josefa had prepared some hours before. He became more and more interested in the girl, and it required but little pressing to persuade him to stay with them that night. The next day he was even more reluctant to leave, and they seemed equally loth that he should do so, and so his stay was extended two or three days.

V.

ONE evening as he stood with Josefa, talking of anything so that he might have the pleasure of her company, and wondering whether the moon ever shone so beautifully before, she suddenly said to him: "Manuel is coming home to-morrow."

"Manuel! Who is Manuel?"

"Ah, you do not know him," she said. Then after a pause, as if reluctant, yet anxious to tell her secret, she added: "We are to be married; he is my lover, and I shall marry him next week. Oh, you should see Manuel! So handsome! not handsome like you are,

but like a Spaniard. You must stay and see Manuel; I would show him the big, strong man I saved."

"I would no doubt entertain him." It was the tone rather than what he said that arrested her attention.

"Ah, I have hurt you now," she said, laying her hand gently on his arm as he turned away. "Forgive me; it was but a joke I intended. You are so good and strong, I did not think."

"Forgive you!" he cried. "You could not offend me; I would give my life to make you happy." Then, as she looked at him in surprise at the earnest intensity of his speech, he added: "Have you not saved my life? And so you see it belongs to you. And you love Manuel very much?"

"Why, yes. Are we not to be married?"

"Then I am glad that you will be happy."

"And you will stay and see Manuel?"

"Yes, I will stay. Now I want to be alone," he added abruptly, and she turned into the house murmuring to herself: "He is so strange. I cannot understand. He is different, that's what it is; he is different." And with this somewhat obscure explanation she was content.

V.

BUT with the visitor it was far otherwise. As she disappeared from his view he strode out in the moonlight and paced up and down with quick, nervous strides. The bright moon cast a flood of silver light over the scene, but somehow the beauty seemed to have departed from it for ever. A gentle breeze fanned his brow, but he was too agitated to feel its soothing effect.

"I might have known it," he muttered. "What am I, that I should hope to win such a prize? A wanderer, without a home that I might offer her. Fool that I was to have stayed here, when I might have known that she would have some lover among her own people. But what right has he to interfere? Stay to see him? Yes, I shall stay, and I shall kill him."

Suddenly he stopped short.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "A fine thing this, for a man like me to give up in this way. To think that a gentle, timid creature like that should make me mad with pain. I have but to say: 'It is over,' and I shall suffer no more."

But his will was weaker than his philosophy. He retired, but not to rest.

He tossed about in a troubled, feverish sleep until daylight, and then rose and strode out into the open air. The atmosphere of the house seemed to stifle him; his old restless longing for an active life was upon him, and he must be moving. "If I had not promised her to see this man," he murmured, "I would go now, and be among the mountains once more. Nature is the only thing that is true, after all. Yet why should I wait to see him? She would be disappointed and unhappy; but am I not unhappy? Shall I go?"

VII.

NEVERTHELESS, in spite of his determination, he lingered on through the day, and into the afternoon. The day was hotter than any he had ever experienced. The atmosphere became more smoky, until the sun shone through it with a lurid light. Even the Spaniards felt prostrated by the unusual heat, and Josefa glanced anxiously towards the mouth of the cañon through which the trail wound by which Manuel was to return. He had gone across the mountain with a herd of cattle, his only companion being a Mexican vaquero, and he had been expected to reach home that morning, but still he did not come.

Suddenly a low, distant rumbling was heard, and a sound as of a strong wind blowing through the trees. The rumbling increased in volume, and the earth began to sway with a sharp, quick motion, that seemed to increase in force with each movement.

"An earthquake!" exclaimed Josefa, springing forward with blanched cheeks. "And Manuel is in the cañon! He will be killed, he will be killed!"

The few horses that were near the house were running wildly to and fro, and the cattle were bellowing, adding to the confusion of the moment. Josefa rushed forward, and securing her favourite horse, was on his back and speeding towards the cañon in a moment. Despite his nervous and excited condition, the traveller rose and followed her as fast as he could, and as the trail in the cañon was difficult for horses, owing to the loosened boulders that had lodged across it and broken it away in places, he overtook her before she had gone far.

"You must not come here," he cried. "The earthquake has loosened these boulders and has cracked the trail, so that it may give way at any moment. Go back, and if Manuel is in the cañon I will find him and bring him safely to you."

"No, I must come," she said briefly, and on they went up the trail. They had not gone far when they came upon the object of their search. Manuel was lying in the trail, beneath an immense boulder, which, wedged between the bank and a small tree on the outer edge of the trail, rested upon his legs so that he could not move, though his arms and body were free.

Although he was not badly hurt, his position was a precarious one, for the boulder in striking the tree had loosened the roots, and the whole trail at that point was likely to give way at any moment, plunging him a thousand feet down the precipice.

VIII.

KEEPING Josefa back from the dangerous point, he examined the situation thoroughly, and then shook his head gravely.

"There is but one way," he muttered to himself, "and any way it will pay my debt. A life for a life is fair turnabout." Then addressing Manuel, he said: "When I tell you push upward with your hand on the boulder, and lie as close to the inner wall as you can. Do you understand?"

"Yes," replied Manuel.

Stepping carefully over the crumbled earth, the stranger caught the small tree, and picked his way out until he stood over the precipice.

"Now push with all your might," he cried, and, giving himself a violent swing outwards, he threw all his weight upon the tree. It trembled a moment, and then the roots tore themselves loose, and tree, boulder, and man went crashing down the precipice.

Josefa, who had gone back round a bend in the trail, heard the crash, and stepping forward saw Manuel lying upon the edge of the trail, released from the boulder, but still lying upon the crumbling earth.

With a glad cry she rushed forward and helped him out of his peril. Then she looked round for his preserver. He was nowhere to be seen.

"Ah, he has gone," she said. "He said he would go when you came, and he has run away from us. But I have you now, Manuel, and I am so happy." Then, with a little shudder, as she looked over the edge of the trail of the seemingly bottomless abyss: "Suppose you had gone over there, Manuel. It would have been terrible!"

BABY SHARPE.

THE * WINNING * OF * GUNHILD:

Or, The Vengeance of the Vikings.

By GEORGE C. WALLIS, Author of "Behind the Barrier," etc.

SUMMARY.

VALSTRAN, a Dane, attacks North-hold, a Viking homestead, during the absence of the young men. Sigismund and Olaf follow the raider, but are defeated, and Olaf is killed. Editha, their mother, and Earl Bjorne, her husband, induced their only remaining son to take Harald Aslison and go out again in the new ship, the *Walrus*. Before leaving, Harald plights his troth to his cousin Gunhild, daughter of Editha. While they are out fighting against great odds at sea, Turgrim, a friend of Bjorne, comes upon the scene, but on learning that Harald requires help, refuses it, and goes on to Bjorne, whose daughter, Gunhild, he wishes to marry.

CHAPTER V.

HOW HARALD WON THE WINGS.

HARALD was not unconscious long. Eric and Sigismund together had turned Valstran's weapon back as it curved to the next stroke, and when Harald opened his eyes again these two were keeping off the Danes like the tough fellows they were. His head was throbbing with a violent pain, and all things swam before his eyes when he staggered to his feet and seized Longsword from one of his men.

But the son of Asli was made of hero-stuff, and, conquering his pain and unsteadiness with a mighty effort of will, he rushed into the fight anew, and, all bleeding and bruised as he was, slew three reckless Danes who came in the way of the keen blade. Then he met Valstran again hand-to-hand, though Eric would have held him back, and Sigismund cried out to the men to follow him closely and have an eye to the swinging axe of the foe.

"Stand back, men!" shouted Harald, so that his voice was heard above the roaring of the storm; "stand back, and let me have fair play with this blustering Dane! Stand back, I say!"

Reluctantly the men of North-hold obeyed, and the enemy also let their leader have a free space, and there the two met again in a duel that each knew would only end with the death of himself or the other. Valstran was by this time like a man bereft of his senses, so long and stubbornly had these sturdy Norsemen withstood him and his crew, and his swings, therefore, came fast and furious, his battle-axe strokes playing on Harald's defence like a fiery hail, and bearing him aback before the fierceness of the onset.

Nevertheless, Aslison grew calmer as the fight went on, and though ever stepping back or sideways to avoid the crushing blows, kept a wary eye on the red-haired Dane's every move, and twice got the point of the long-sword through his guard, and drew blood on his left arm.

This made Valstran wilder than before, and he foamed

at the mouth like a berserker, and gritted his teeth with rage, and redoubled his frantic efforts, till Harald saw that he must close with him, and that speedily, if he would keep a whole skin.

So just when the gleaming axe came sweeping down he sprang nimbly aside and let out suddenly in the other's face with the keen sword. Valstran saw the flash of the steel and jerked back his head so that the blade was foiled of its aim, but so great was the force that its owner's arm had given it, and so sharp its edge, that it passed clear through the thick pine shaft of the axe, severing it in twain as neatly as a woodman's knife lops off the dry branches of a sapless tree!

"It is a good blade that Thrunna gave me!" cried Harald with a grim laugh at his foe's discomfiture, "and well-tempered, I swear! It shall win me a name yet. And, Sir Dane, get you some other weapon, and let us finish this little bout of ours—if you dare!"

Stung to additional fury by the taunt, Valstran seized a sword and flew at his enemy, and the two were soon deeply engrossed in an interchange of straight cuts and short slashes and firm thrusts and swift strokes and lightning parries and cunning feints, till the young eyes and strong arms of Harald began to tell in his favour.

Then slowly he recovered the ground he had lost, and pressed the other back towards the fore hatchway. Valstran struck out at random now, and not so often, as his strength failed, and when, in recoiling from a flaming slash of the Norse blade, his feet caught in the combings of the hatch and he stumbled, Harald leapt forward with a fierce laugh, and raising the long sword high above his head, brought it down upon the other with such true aim and stern force, that the matchless edge cut right through chain-mail and jerkin and flesh and sinew and bone, and the nearly-severed body was hurled in a heap through the loosely-closed woodwork of the hatch down into the hold!

A mighty shout of victory rose from his men at that master-stroke, and with one accord they fell upon the startled Danes and quickly drove them to their own vessels, and then, led by Harald, boarded in their turn, and hunted them down and slew them one by one till not a Dane was left alive in the three ships, and the sea was rid for good and all of that sea-wolf and his ravening crew.

But when the struggle was over, they found Harald leaning against his own mast, his hot fingers still clutching the handle of the long sword, but so death-like a pallor on his face that it was visible under the wet salt glaze and in the dim light afforded by the stray moonbeams that now shot through the rapidly sailing clouds. Eric and Wulfhere saw him first and seized him ere he fell to the deck, and tenderly carried him to shelter and laid him on a rude couch and fetched Sigismund to him. Between the three of them they wiped the brine from his skin and washed him and then left him to sleep till dawn.

Meantime, the storm still raged—the Storm-Yötun, Aegar, was in one of his wildest moods—and not until far into the next day did the sea calm sufficiently for the sailors to unhook the grappling chains of the two empty ships and cast them loose with holes in their keels below the water-line so that they sank, and then, at Sigismund's command, they ran into a little solitary creek where only peaceful fisher-folk dwelt, and after quieting the alarm their sudden appearance caused, took Harald ashore and had him nursed in one of the huts.



The nearly-severed body was hurled down into the hold.

Some weeks the Vikings lingered there, resting and helping the villagers to fish and putting the *Walrus* to rights, and Harald recovered from his hurts and grew strong and well again and was impatient to be going home.

But Sigismund, who had a wise head on his young shoulders, would not hear of undue haste.

"The storm has blown us far out of the beaten track," he said to the fretful youth, "and though you have fairly won the right to wear the golden-winged helm of your father's, which you have in the ship, you must be well rested from the strain that the gaining of the right has cost you. And if that traitor Turgrimm has, indeed, gone to North-hold, as you fear, it will be well to be prepared with strong sinews and steady nerves for the meeting with him!"

"You are right, Sigismund," said Harald, stroking the fair curls of a little Norse maiden who clung to his knee—a little maiden whose blue eyes were as lustrous and deep as his sister Thelma's. "You are right; yet I fear every moment of delay while that crafty hound is there—for something of myself and Gunhild I must have told you when I raved in my fever-madness after that night?"

Sigismund understood and nodded, then said quietly, as was his habit when well pleased:

"No one better could I wish to be at once my cousin and brother. As soon as I feel justified in letting you go we will hoist sail."

And Harald held out his right hand and Sigismund grasped it, and the two looked into each other's eyes, and in the silence knew that their souls swore eternal friendship, and that the desire of each was henceforth to be aided by the other to the end of life—be it near or far.

Then after a few days more of rest, Sigismund gave way to Harald's pleadings, and they set the bow of the long ship for the fjord on which stood the home of their kith and kin.

The place seemed strangely deserted as they let down the gangway plank to the shore, and Harald felt a chill of terror at the silence of it all as he leapt to the ground in the fresh morning air.

"What evil thing has befallen the hold, Brun?" he inquired of a solitary fisherman whom they discovered mending his nets under the lee of an upturned boat. "Has some spell fallen on the place, that none of the folks are stirring?"

"Why, 'tis the young Earl!" cried Brun, uprising as quickly as the rheumatism in his old limbs would allow, "and all too late come, I fear, if you would have Gunhild to wife, as we all hoped."

"What has happened? Speak, man!" cried Harald, clutching his shoulder in the extremity of his fear for his love, till the old man cringed in his grasp, "out with your news, no matter how evil it may be!"

"Well, Earl Harald," said Brun, "this is Gunhild's wedding day, and all the folk are feasting in the grand hall, and I expect by now she is wife to surly Turgrimm, whom we all wish anywhere but here. But you have made my shoulder ache, young sir!"

Harald heard not the last half of the old man's tale: he was out of hearing before it was finished, and running as though for his life with long swinging strides up the hill to the hold, and had outdistanced the others by a hundred paces when he reached and opened the door, and burst in upon the amazed guests.

CHAPTER VI. THE FIGHT AT THE FEAST.

STALWART and glorious he looked as he stood there in the hall in the full glow of the sunlight that gleamed on the golden wings of his helm and glittered adown his mail and threw into bold relief the sinewy outlines of his form; and Gunhild, recognising him before any of the others save his mother, rose to her feet and gave a little cry of joyous surprise, and then, with a wild, impetuous motion, took the golden hoop that shone with gems as many as the stars in

the northern crown, from among the sunny masses of her hair and threw it to the floor at Turgrimm's feet.

A moment they stood thus; the traitor who knew that his prey was snatched from him at the last, staring wildly at Harald through the smart of the ale in his eyes, and wishing that he had not hung his sword and belt on the wall opposite in order to indulge his appetite to the full. Then, as Sigismund and the others filled up the doorway behind him, Harald drew the long sword from its sheath and said:

"You offer me no greeting, Uncle Bjorne, when I return with name and fame and the wings upon my head? You thank me not for coming in time to save Gunhild the disgrace of being wife to a cowardly traitor!"

"Yes, you are strangely silent, husband," said Editha, before Turgrimm could reply to the purposed insult.

"Peace, woman!" cried the old Earl, rising in his place,



The two looked into each other's eyes.

"let us know what has kept you away this long time, Harald Aslison, and why you speak of my guest thus?"

His manner was stern and his voice threatening; for Bjorne was in a very irritable mood, being neither pleased with himself nor with anyone else.

"Sigismund shall tell you what has kept us away so long," said Harald, smiling grimly, "and then you will not need to ask why I spoke as I did."

And he leant on his sword whilst his cousin told the tale of Turgrimm's meanness and his own brave deed, and at the hearing of how he had slain Valstran, such a wild Viking cheer went up from the men of North-hold that the rafters rang again with its echo, and a kestrel wheeling in mid air near the cliffs was startled by the sound of it.

And Freyda whispered to Gunhild, seeing the girl's secret in her burning cheeks and flashing eyes: "He is a worthy lover for you—this son of mine!"

Gunhild answered not, but clasped Harald's mother's hand tightly in her own, and with her free arm pressed wondering Thelma to her side. Harald, seeing the three standing together at the far end of the table, was glad, but had no time for gentle words just then.

"Yes, Earl Bjorne," he said, "that is our story, and that is why I ask you how it is you thank me not for coming to save Gunhild from being wedded to this knave."

The old man groaned aloud, answering not, but Turgrimm replied, attempting to brave the matter out:

"The marriage feast shall not be stopped by the idle, spiteful chatter of a braggart stripling but just out of his teens. To your tables, men, and when the ceremonies are over I will set you to chastise this bitter-tongued youngling for his false sneers."

Instead of noticing him, however, all men turned to look at Harald, who strode a step nearer to his rival, and said calmly:

"You fear my strength and skill, traitor, or you would have given me back my charges at the sword point, poltroon that you are!"

"I do not waste good steel on rash youngsters," said Turgrimm, though shifting uneasily, and glancing furtively and longingly at his heavy blade on the wall.

"Nothing!" cried Harald, raising his sword till it flashed in his hand like a bar of light, "Nothing! You are not worth a fair fight, and so, by all the Gods of Asgard, if you do not turn at bay, I will cut you down, even here, in my uncle's hall, come what may of it!" And the long blade came to within an inch of Turgrimm's side.

The craven hesitated no longer then, but ran round the table for his own weapons, and Harald came after so close on his heels that in fear of the keen blade behind, Turgrimm passed them without a stop, and would have slunk outdoors but that Sigismund and the others barred his way. Then twice more round the table he sped, with Longsword after him, while the men of North-hold roared aloud at his evil plight, and the women laughed and called him "nimble-foot," and his own men sat and muttered under their breath till presently one of these latter put out his foot as Harald came past, and tripped him to the floor.

In an instant he was afoot again, and an arrow of Eric's quivered in the man's back, but Turgrimm had seized the chance and his shield and blade, and stood on the defensive, calling to his crew to aid him.

At that Sigismund and the men of the *Walrus* got out their weapons, and fell upon the guests, and then uprore such a clamour in North-hold Hall as had never been known since Bjorne's grandfather Offa had slain Edda his brother as he sat drunk in his chair, for jealousy.

The women clung together at the lower end of the room, palely anxious, but without cry or sound, while the men of the *Walrus* and the men of the *Hawk* fought and struggled in the *mêlée* of overturned tables and broken stools and spilt ale, and food trampled underfoot, and so fiercely they strove that twice Turgrimm fell and escaped by the skin of his teeth, that a flying dagger, missing its aim, was embedded to



An arrow of Eric's quivered in the man's back.

the hilt in one of the criss-cross beams of the wall, and that two of the combatants who were locked in the death-grip near the fire fell upon the blazing logs in a helpless heap, when one of Eric's arrows pierced the follower of Turgrimm in the side, and they were with difficulty got out and separated before being burned beyond hope.

The opposing parties were evenly matched, and the fray might have been long-drawn-out had not Earl Bjorne—having held his men back with great trouble—at last made his stern voice heard above the wild tumult, and commanded that as they all valued the rules of hospitality and common civility they would hold down their weapons in his house while they called themselves his guests and friends.

Harald had already shivered his enemy's blade with his own ringing steel, and had got the traitor by the throat with his left hand, and was shortening his sword in the act of running him through, when the others dropped their hands, and he heard the words of Bjorne. Even then he would have made an end of his foe—and better it would have been had he done so—had not Gunhild rushed forward and stayed him with her hand.

"Nay, slay him not, Harald, but let him go like the disgraced cur that all men now know he is."

With a wild cry of hate and impotent chagrin, Turgrimm wrenched himself from Longsword's grasp, and calling his men together, went with them out of the hall in the midst of a great silence.

Six of the guests were left dead amid the wreckage of the feast, and five of the men of the *Walrus*. The first they took and flung outside to their comrades, the latter the



"Slay him not, Harald!"

women cleansed and laid out on a rude bier, and then began putting the place to rights, as is the way of women in a house. And Harald sheathed his blade and went to old Bjorne and said:

"I crave pardon, uncle, for treating your guests so roughly. Pray tell me that I have your pardon—for I was sorely tried—and give me your permission and your men to hunt down this traitor without delay."

"And I, too, crave that boon," said one-armed Sigismund.

Bjorne thought moodily awhile before he spoke, meeting the approving gaze of his wife and of Asli's widow as he said:

"No, Harald. There has been blood enough spilt in my house to-day; enough of my visitors slain. Also, this man is the friend of my second cousin, Ogier, and for his sake I must let the coward and his crew go. For the rest, you have my pardon."

The two young men turned away at that, knowing further appeal would be useless, and Freyda and Thelma met Harald, and the one wept over him for joy at his success, and the other clung to his hand and gazed into his face with all a child's awe at the strong and marvellous.

"Yes, little one!" laughed Harald, raising his favourite to his shoulder, where she held on by the wings of his helm, "You will have a warrior do as much for you some day, with those wonderful deep eyes of yours!"

And then, after he was washed and refreshed, Harald sought out Gunhild—who was not hard to find—and they talked much. And Harald's man, Eric, stole round to the back of the house and made love to Iduna, Gunhild's maid.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMING OF OGIER.

THOUGH thus roughly repulsed, and with no excuse left for further lingering, Turgrimm—keeping for the most part of his time on board the *Hawk*, which lay moored below the landing-place—stayed in the fjord for several days, and when one misty morning he saw the peak-sails of a short but deep-draughted ship coming round the bend of the cliffs, he frowned angrily to himself and bade the men hoist a friendly signal.

In answer from the other vessel up went the fluttering ensign of the *Silver Fox* which Turgrimm knew so well as the name of his friend's ship, and presently unseen by the landsfolk, the sides of the two craft grazed and his friend Ogier stepped aboard the *Hawk*.

"Greeting, friend," said Ogier, grasping the other's hand, "what do you here?"

"I came after a girl's pretty face—more fool that I was—and have been well snubbed for my pains," said the other bitterly.

"After Gunhild?" asked Ogier. He was a man of few words, was this tall, dark warrior, whose cool bravery had won him wealth and renown in many a hot fight.

"Yes," answered Turgrimm, "and the saucy minx would have none of me, and her father and brother were full of harsh words. So I am sulking here until the fit seizes me to stir!"

Not a word of his own treachery and rough treatment; not a word of Harald!

"Well, friend," said slow-speaking

Ogier, going back to his ship after some further talk, in which he made no mention of his own purpose, "I am here on a short visit, and I will talk of this with these relatives of mine."

And when the *Silver Fox* was out of the range of hearing, Turgrimm said aloud: "There goes his friendship, I'll warrant. It will be as well to be out of here before he knows the truth, for he is one of those silly sticklers at trifles who would slay himself or anyone else for honour!"

Ogier went in, and all innocent of the events of the last few weeks, was made as jovially welcome at dinner as the home folks could make him, and through the whole of that day thought that it was no marvel his friend had loved fair Gunhild, seeing that he—who was so very hard to move to tenderness for women—was even more in love with the Earl's daughter now than when he had last seen her, a year ago.

And when the women left the room at night, Ogier leant back in his chair and thought that the time had come to speak that which was in his mind. But being very sensitive to rebuffs, and more fearful of failure in love affairs than in matters of war, he resolved to speak to Gunhild before he mentioned his desire to her father. If she looked on him with favour, well and good; if not—and the way her eyes brightened when young Harald spoke to her gave Ogier some misgivings—if not, he would go away and try to forget.

Editha took Gunhild aside that night and said in a softer tone than was her custom:

"You will be asked again in marriage ere to-morrow night, child, for a multitude of lovers is the penalty of fairness such as yours. Shall I speak in this Ogier's favour for you, or not?"

"What mean you, mother?" said Gunhild, open-eyed, thinking of Harald the while, "how know you that our guest will do what you say?"

"I have made no mistake," said the Earl's wife, smiling

shrewdly, "he is rich and a widower, and it is a long way here from his home. His glance was on you all the time you were in sight, and three times when Sigismund spoke to him he was so lost in reflection that he answered not. It will be as I say."

Gunhild was silent, and after a pause Editha went on:

"But there is one in whose favour I may speak, if Freyda tells me truly, and his name is not Ogier! Am I not right in that also, child?"

Gunhild's colour deepened and she would have said "yes," but that she was a little afraid of her stern mother even yet over this matter, so she said naively:

"I cannot feel the same for this Ogier that I do for cousin Harald."

Editha laughed softly to herself, and said no more.

Sure enough Ogier spoke to Gunhild, as her mother had prophesied, and that sooner than the girl had expected.

She had gone with Sigismund up the fjord to fish in the early morning, a time of day she dearly loved to be about, and which, perchance, had given that delicate rose tint to her fresh, young cheeks; when Ogier came pulling up the crystal waterway and joined them as they passed the spot where the river falls with a mellowed roar in twenty white-wreathed leaps into the deep flood below. Then Sigismund, feeling lazy, got ashore on a green island, and let the two go on, bidding them pick him up on the way back.

Silently the thoughtful man rowed up the still waters, past more green islets and clumps of wild raspberry and hemlock, behind which the buzzards called to each other, until they came to the shadow of the great cliff whose rocky face goes sheer down to the fjord bottom without a jutting crag or needle to entangle the fisher's lines.

On all sides of them—for Gunhild was in Ogier's boat—rose the fir-clad mountains, purple and stupendous, and on the bright greenery of birch and pine, and spruce twig and bilberry bush seen on the lower slopes, the dew-gems strung on the gauze-threads of the morning sparkled like a tracery

of molten silver fire. And save for the occasional scream of a kestrel overhead or the rustle of the hawks as they sought their nests in the cliff-face, all was wrapped in a quiet that one hesitates to break.

Yet love unloosed the tongue of the man of few words, and presently, when the long weighted lines had been thrown and several good trout hauled in, Ogier, taking Gunhild's hand in his, said, with a heart-tremour such as he had never felt in the thick of the fiercest fray:

"Can you guess, fair Gunhild, why I am here at North-hold?"

"Partly, sir; but I wish you would not hold my hand so

tightly. You are my father's cousin, and he is noted for his strict hospitality, and there is better fishing here than at most places!" and Gunhild looked at him shyly, yet with a merry laugh in her bright eyes.

"All excellent good reasons," said Ogier, his words

coming with great trouble, "but not one of them is the true reason, fair child. There is a maiden lives at North-hold, with whom I am in love, and it is her presence that brings



"What mean you, mother?" said Gunhild.

me here. And you can tell me her name if you will, and whether my love is likely to be looked upon with favour."

It was in Gunhild's mind to ask, with a jest, whether this fair one was Iduna, her maid; but she glanced at Ogier ere she spoke and the smile died on her lips at the earnestness she saw there, and she replied:

"Yes, I know that it is I, Ogier, whom you would ask to love you. And sooner than trifle with such an honest heart as yours is, I must tell you that it cannot be."

Ogier was not downcast at once, but went on his knee before the fair girl—whose golden locks, escaping from her coil, shone in the morning sun like a shoulder-mantle of priceless worth—and bent his dark head over her dainty hand and kissed it reverently and said:

"I do not ask you to marry me at once, Gunhild, but I would plead that you think of me, and, if you can, come to love me, no matter how little. No other shall I have if I have not you, and no other can love you more deeply. Pray tell me there is hope, and I shall be more than satisfied."

The girl looked down at the man's bronzed, honest face, handsome now with the earnestness of his pleading, and tears stood in her grave eyes.

"I am more troubled than I can tell you, Ogier, that my luckless face should thus excite such a hopeless love in one so brave and true of heart, but it is better that you should know, once and for all, that it cannot be. There is another who loves me—whom I love."

"Harald?" asked the man, with a quiver in his voice.

"Yes, Harald," answered the girl, disengaging her hand.

"Well, he is a brave youth and a good one, Gunhild," said Ogier, rising and mastering his emotion like the true man he was, "and I pray that you and he may be happy."

"I trust that we shall, and I shall always remember your gentleness," said she; then added, a sudden thought arising: "Have you spoken to my father—of—of this?"

"No, child. I thought that yourself should best know your own mind's desire."

"Then I am more grateful than words can tell," said Gunhild, "and think it will be better for both of us if what has passed between us this morning remain known only to ourselves. It will save you from much thankless pity, Ogier, and me from much flattery."

"It shall be our secret," said Ogier.

Then they pulled in their lines and rowed back to the islet and roused Sigismund, and went home for the morning meal.

(To be concluded.)



Ogier.

LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 9.—Spanish Bill Helps Point a Moral.

"It is just after Short Creek Dave gets to be one of them evangelists," remarked the old cattleman as we made company for each other one evening, "an' has been exhortin' of us Wolfville people over in the warehouse of the New York store, as Dan Boggs confides in me how once he mebbly half-way makes up his mind he'll be religious.

"Leastwise," says Boggs, when he takes me into his past that away, 'I allows I'll be religious in the spring after the round-ups is iver.

"It's in the winter when I makes this determination, an' of course the spring round-up is months away. But I allers puts it up I'd shorely made it, an' got plumb into the fold, only it was a bad winter, an' in the spring the cattle was weak an' starved; an' gettin' down an' chillin' to death about the water-holes; an' I was ridin' the hills a-cussin' an' a-pullin' of 'em up on to their feet; an' all 'round it's that rough an' I'm that profane an' violent, I reckons towards April probably my soul's buried under ten foot of cuss words, an' j'inin' the church in my case is mighty necessary.

"You see," says Boggs that time, 'thar's no use tryin' to hold out cards or coal-deck your Redeemer. If your heart ain't right it's no use to set into the game. He sees plumb through every card you holds, an' nuthin' but a straight deal from the warm deck does Him.

"So I thinks bein' as how you can't fool your way into Heaven, an' recallin' the bad language I uses that spring an' winter workin' them cattle, I won't even try. An' that's why, when resolvin' one winter to get religion mebbly next June, I don't get nothin' when June comes but whisky, an' goes on an' persists in my sinful life as thartofore.

"It's over to Taos I gets this religious idea. I'm just into camp from someers down 'round Seven Rivers, in the Pecos country, an' I don't know a soul. Which I'm by nature sociable an' gregarious; so not knowin' what folks weighs an' preys on me, an' the first night I hastens to remedy this yere evil.

"I'm the possessor of wealth to a limited extent—for I shore despises bein' broke complete, an' generally keeps as good as a blue stack in my war-bags—an' so I goes projectin' round from dance hall to saloon an' decimates my dinero and acquires nose paint an' friends.

"As that ain't but three saloons incloosive of the hurdy-gurdy, I'm goin' cursin' on these grand rounds I've instituted on a sort of triangle. It can't be said but I'm makin' runnin' of it, however, an' I don't reckon now it's more'n an hour when I knows all the good people

in Taos, bar Mexicans an' what Eastern folks would get fooled into callin' "the bitter element." It also follows like its lariat does a loose pony, that I'm some loaded, not to say confoosed.

"It's because I'm confoosed I'm misled into this prayer-meetin'. Not such exercises is due to dim my chances none now, nor yereafter, but I ain't calculated to adorn no such exercises, nor take proper part tharin; an' I'd shorely passed it up an' kept on to the hurdy-gurdy if I'd known.

"As it stands, I blunders into the game inadvertent, but havin' picked up the hand I nacherally goes on an' plays it.

"It's this way about them religious exercises: I'm just emerged from the "Tub of Blood," an' am p'intin' out for the dance-hall when I crosses the trail of a wicke-up all lighted, an' singin' on the inside. I takes it for a joint I don't know an' ain't seen none as yet, an' nacherally heads up an' enters. From the noise I allows mebbly it's a Mexican place, which greasers allers puts up a heap o' singin' an' scufflin' an' talkin' in all they does from monte to a bull-fight.

"The second I'm in I sees it ain't Mexicans an' it ain't monte. Good people they was; I sees that; an' as a passel of 'em near the door looks shocked at sight of me, I'm too bashful to break out again, but sorter aiges into the nearest seat an' stands pat.

"I can see for all I has under my belt the outfit figgers on me raisin' the long yell an' stampedin' round permiscus to make trouble; an' so I thinks to mysef I'll fool you all a lot, for I just won't say a word.

"So I sets quiet as a coyote at noon, an' after a while the sharp who's dealin' for 'em goes on with his orisons which I interrupts as I comes surgin' in.

"When he's talkin' he says one thing I remembers. It's about castin' your bread upon the waters. He allows you'll get it again an' plenty with it. It's playin' a white chip to win a blue; that's what this sharp says, an' it shorely strikes me as a dead easy game.

"Every time you does good, says this sky 'pilot, Fate is out to play a return game with you; an' sooner or later you quits winner on all the good you promulgates that away.

"I sets the deal out an' gets some sleepy at it too. But I won't leave till the end, so as not to scand'lise the congregation; an' as I contributes some heavy when the plate goes by, I ain't regarded as no setback to the meetin' neither.

"When the contreebution box—which she's a tin plate—comes down where I be, I'm sorter noddin', I'm

that sleepy. I hears the jingle of money an' rouses up thinkin' mebbly it's poker I reckon.

"How hard are you in?" I says to the part next door to me who's just gone to the centre for a peso.

"Dollar," says the party.

"Well," I says, "I ain't seen my hand since the draw, but I'll raise yon nine just the same." An' I boards a ten-dollar bill.

"When the rest goes I sorter sidles forth an' lines for the dance hall. The fact is, I'm needin' what you call stimulants. But all the same it sticks in my head about that bread business, an' castin' good deeds on the water that away. It sticks thar yet for that matter.

"Bein' released from the devotions of them people I starts in to drinkin' agin with zeal an' earnestness. Thar comes a time when all my money is in my boot.

"You see, I only takes two stacks of reds with me when I embarks on this yere debauch. Bein' some crafty; an' a new injun at that agency that away; an' not knowin' what game I may go against, I puts the rest of my bank roll over in Howard's store.

"It turns out, too, that every time I acquires silver in change, I carefully commits it to my left boot, which is high an' ample an' seems to be built to hold specie.

"Why I puts this yere silver money in my boot laig, is shore too many for me as a conundrum. But I recalls that I feels mighty cunnin' over it at the time, an' regards it as heap deep play.

"As I tells you, thar arrives an hour while I'm in the "Tub of Blood," when my money's all in my boot an' thar's still liquor to be purchased. Fact is, I just then meets a gent named Hawkins; as good a citizen as ever rides a deck, or pulls a trigger, an' of course p'liteness demands we put a bottle or two in play at once.

"That's why I has to have money. I don't care to go pullin' off my boot in the "Tub of Blood," an' makin' of a vulgar display of my wealth by pourin' the silver on to the floor. Thar's a peck of it, if thar's dos reals; an' such an exhibition as spillin' it out in the "Tub of Blood," is bound to mortify me and Hawkins, too; an' most likely lead to the barkeep or somebody makin' remarks. So I concloods I'll hop outside an' round up my silver, an' then return.

"Excuse me," I says to Hawkins, "just you camp right yere with the bottle an' I'll be among you agin in a minute all spraddled out."

"So I goes wanderin' out back of the "Tub of Blood" whar it's lonesome an' thar's no body lookin' on bar coyotes, an' camps down back of a Spanish bayonet bush an' tugs away to get my boot off, an' my dinero into circ'lation.

"An' while I am at it, sleep and nose-paint seizes me, an my light goes plumb out. I rolls over behind the bayonet bush, an' snores off to sleep. It must have made them coyotes stop an' consider a whole lot about whar I be.

"Just to show you how good them coyotes is, I want to tell you—I don't notice it none till the next day—while I'm curled up to the rare of that bush they comes mighty near eatin' of the scabbard off my gun while it's in my belt. Fact; the scabbard looks afterwards like some pup not otherwise engaged has been chewin' it. But of course, bein' dead entire like I was from visitin' round so much, I ain't mindin' nothin' so oninterestin' as a coyote bitin' on the leather of my gun.

"Now this is where that bluff about bread on the waters comes in; an' it falls all so pat on the heels of them devotions of mine that night, it he's brand an' brand it on my memory.

"While I'm layin' thar too dead to skin from nose paint, and mighty likely while them coyotes is lunchin' off my scabbard that away; along comes a bad man they calls Spanish Bill. I learns afterwards how this Spanish Bill is hard clean through. He's rustled everything from a bunch of ponies to the mail bags, an' ain't reckoned nuthin' but a hold-up who needs hangin' every minute of the day.

"Whatever takes him out to where I lays by my bayonet bush I never knew. He don't disclose nuthin' on that p'int afterwards; an' I've figgered more than once mebbly he tracks up on me accidental.

"But what informs me some plain that he explores my war-bags for stuff before he concloods to turn in an' look after my health is that later on when I unfurls my finances to him he seems sorter disapp'inted an' hurt.

"When this yere Spanish Bill ropes on to me I don't know nuthin'. The stateticks furnished by the barkeep of the "Tub of Blood" next day goes to the effect that I'm shorely out thar four hours.

"When Spanish Bill discovers me I'm mighty near froze stiff; for I'll let you in quiet and between us, those nights in November has a heap of things in common with them Arctic regions we hears of, where Franklin an' Kane an' the rest of that passel of fur-lined sports goes in pursuote of that North Pole.

"So, bein' froze that away, an' mebbly from an over dab of nose paint, I never saveys a thing about this yere Spanish Bill ontill hours afterwards.

"But the barkeep says this Spanish Bill drags me into the "Tub of Blood," an' allows he's got a maverick.

"Fix this yere froze party up something with fire an' teeth," says Spanish Bill to the barkeep. "I don't know him none; but he's got to be recovered if it takes every chip in the check rack."

"So the barkeep an' Spanish Bill stands in an' brings me to, so I can walk some if Spanish Bill goes along steadyin' of me by the collar. Tharupon said Spanish Bill rides herd on me till he gets me down to the Jackson House an' spreads me out on some blankets.

"It's daylight when I gets around so I knows my name's "Boggs," an' I'm a native of Kentucky, an' little personal things like that. An' what wakes me up is this Spanish Bill; he's shakin' my shoulder.

"See yere," says this hold-up, "I'm goin' to turn in now an' yere's what you do. Thar's five whisky checks on the 'Tub of Blood' which will he'p you to an appetite. Followin' of a sufficient quantity of whisky you will return to the Jackson House an' eat. I won't be rolled outen my blankets by then, but they knows that Spanish Bill makes good, 'cause I impresses in on 'em speshul when I comes in.

"You don't know me," goes on this Spanish Bill, as I sets up and blinks at him some foggy an' blurred yet, "an' I don't know you; which we'll allow outen p'liteness is a dead loss to both. But my name's Spanish Bill, an' I'm turnin' monte in the Bank Exchange. I'll be thar at my table by first drink this evenin'; an' if you'll sa'nter that way at that epoch as your busted an' ain't got no money, of course, I'll stakes you on my way."

"It's this bluff about me not havin' money puts me in mind when my head's in better thinkin' order that this Bill must have rustled my raiments that time I'm presided over by coyotes while I sleeps. When he says it, however, I merely remarks that while I'm grateful to him as mockin' birds, money after all ain't no object

with me; an' pullin' off my high moccasin I pours some two pounds of specie on to the blankets I'm camped on.

"Which I merely packs this in my boot," I observes, "to put mysef in mind I've got a roll big enough to choke a cow over to Howard's store."

"An' I'm glad to hear it," says this Spanish Bill; though as I suggests he acts pained an' amazed at the exhibition like a man does who's overlooked a bet.

"Well, that's all thar is to that part. That's where Spanish Bill launches that bread of his'n, an' as I states, it sorter bears down on me as a thought like a saddle that don't fit, an' keeps me feelin' an' rememberin' what that sky scout says at the prayer meetin' about the action a man gets by playin' a good deed to win.

"It's the middle of January; mebbly two months later when I'm over on the upper Caliente about fifty miles west of the Spanish Peaks. I'm workin' a bunch of cattle; Bar-c-Bar was the brand, an' the y'ear mark's a swallow-fork in the left y'ear, with the right y'ear under-hacked."

"What's the good of a y'ear mark when thar's a brand?" repeated the old cattleman after me; for I had interrupted his tale of Boggs' troubles with the question: "Whatever's the good of y'ear marks? Why, when cattle is in a bunch standin' so close you can't see no brands on their sides, an' you're looking' through the bunch to cut out what don't belong therein, y'ear marks is all you can go by.

"They all turns to look at you as you come ridin' an' pesterin' about among 'em, an' thar you get their y'ear marks like printin' on the page of a book. If you was to try an' go over a herd by the brands you wouldn't cut out a steer an hour. But to go back after Boggs.

"I'm ridin' down a draw one time," says this Dan Boggs, 'cussin' the range, which is bad, an' the weather which is worse—it's the hard winter I mentions when so many cattle dies an' I swears so much—when my pony goes to having symptoms.

"This pony I've saddled—I has ten in all—is that sagacious that while it makes not the slightest mention of cattle when they're near, never draws up on deer, or people, or anybody strange in the hills, but it takes to givin' of manifestations so as I can square mysef for whatever game they opens on us.

"As I says, me an' this yere wise pony is just pushin' out into the Calient when the pony begins to act queer an' make signs. I brings him down all cautious where we can look out across the valley, an' you can gamble I'm some astonished to see a gent walkin' along a foot out mebbly a couple of hundred yards. He sorter limps, an' leans over on one side, like he's hurt.

"Nacherally I stops an' surveys him careful. It's plenty strange he's there at all, an' stranger still, he's a-foot. So I looks him over for weapons—I wants to note what he's like, an' how he's heeled.

"You saveys as well as me it don't do to go canterin' out to strangers that away in the hills, speshully a stranger who's a-foot. He might want your pony for one thing, an' open a game on you permiscus with his gun, an' would leave you broke, an' too dead to know it.

"I'm allers cautious around a man who's lost his hoss. It makes him cruel, crazy an' frocious, helpless, an' let out, he goes plumb locoed. A gent afoot is a heap easier to aggravate, an' a mighty sight more likely to lay for you than if he's safe an' solid in a Texas saddle with a Spanish pony between his knees.

"Which is why I remarks that I takes in this

pedestrian all car'ful an' stacks him up ackerate before I goes after him.

"As I says, he carries on like he's hurt, an' he's packin' a six-shooter. He makes a sorter familiar figure, too, an' while I looks him over I'm wonderin' where I crosses his trail before.

"As I has the advantage of a Winchester I at least rides out into the open an' gives a whoopee. The party turns, comes limpin' towards me, an' whoever do you allow it is?

"Which it's shorely Spanish Bill, an' it's right yere he gets action on that bread on the waters he plays in when he recovers me an' releves the coyotes that time in Taos, on which occasion disinterested people like the barkeep of the "Tub of Blood," offers two to one I'd shorely freeze stiff if Spanish Bill hadn't stood in on the play.

"To make it brief, here is how it is: Spanish Bill tells me that after I leaves Taos he goes over an' deals monte a bit at Wagon Mound. One night a Mexican comes caperin' in, an' after Spanish Bill gives him a lay-out or two he makes a bet of fifty dollars on the queen—what the greasers call the hoss. The Mexican loses, an' instead of takin' it easy like a sport should he grabs the money.

"As was his duty, Spanish Bill wipes him over the head with his six-shooter as a reason to drop the money. The Mexican tharupon searches out a knife, an' this so complicates the business Spanish Bill in an effort to simplify things, ups an' shoots the Mexican full of holes.

"The shootin' was on the square, an' of course noone takes no hostile notice of it. Spanish Bill goes on laying out his monte cards same as usual. Two days later, though, he gets a p'inter the Mexicans are fixin' for him. So that night he moves camp, mebbly it's 160 miles from Wagon Mound over on the Vermejo.

"But the greasers hang to the trail, it seems; for the day before I tracks up on him, as he an' a side pard whose name is Hill, is ridin' along, a band of Mexicans hops outen a dry arroyo where they're bush-whackin' for 'em, an' goes to shootin'.

"As might be expected, Spanish Bill an' his pard turns loose an' shoots back agin free an' frequent, an' near as I sees, they shorely enjoys a high, successive time.

"They downs Spanish Bill's pony an' creases his side; which is what curves him over, an' indooes him to limp when I meets up with him. As well as he knows his pard charges plumb through; an' as Spanish Bill goes down with his pony, leaves him, allowing he's dead an' done for good.

"Which it was this pard's turn to know that Spanish Bill's dead before ever he lines out; but he's weak or rattled, so he don't stop to investigate. Spanish Bill puts it up when he tells me the story, he's due to shoot up this pard of his'n for abandonin' him that away, if he ever crosses up with him. Which bein' as it should be, I fully approves tharof.

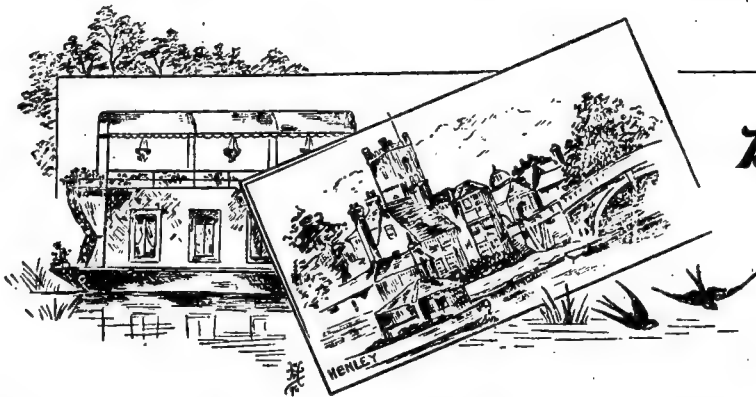
"When this yere Spanish Bill goes down, the Mexican scatter likewise. They was shy two people with another plugged deep and good; all of which I hear afterwards; so you notes that Bill an' his mate is aiming low an' excellent.

"It's only a half mile to a little ranch, an' Spanish Bill gets over thar as soon as he can, an' gettin' a pony an' saddle, which he easy does with his money, he breaks back into the hills, where we met. He's afoot, because that mornin' his pony gets tired of the deal an' bucks him off, an' goes stampedin' back where he gets him.

"'While he's talkin' I recalls how Spanish Bill rounds me up that night in Taos, so I don't hesitate. I takes him over to my camp an' fixes him up. The next mornin' he turns his nose towards Texas on one of my best ponies; which is the last I sees or hears of Spanish Bill—unless he's the Bill who's lynched over near Eagle's Pass a year later, of which I has no proof, but surmises it some likely.

"'It's after Spanish Bill is gone, I brings up again what that Gospel person says about doin' benevolences, an' how after many days you reaps a big winnin', an'

lives on velvet for all eternity. An' don't you know this Spanish Bill pickin' me up that night, an' then in less than two months when he's afoot an' hurt in the hills, gettin' against me an' drawin' out of the game ahead a saddle, a pony an' safety, makes it look like that Bible sharp is right? That's how it strikes me, an' just as I tells you, if so many cattle hadn't died that spring, an' if I hadn't give way so frightful in my talk, I'd shorely trailed down a congregation the next June, an' got a stack an' stood in."



Brought to her Senses.

"GREG, are you awake?" calls a tumbled heap of femininity upon the sofa.

"I am." And a wreath of cigarette smoke floats above a masculine head lying comfortably amid a heap of cushions in the big armchair.

"I've just come across these old letters in my desk. I'm going to read them aloud."

"I'm at your mercy."

"I'll stir up the fire first. I want more light. There! Just listen to this, now:

"MY OWN DEAREST GREGORY,—For the last time I write you thus. Yes, indeed, it must be so. It has all been a happy, foolish dream, but now it must end. To-day, I release you from our engagement. A marriage between us would be most ridiculous. We are both so very young—too young to decide so important a matter; mamma says so, and I am sure she is right. We have had a long talk. Besides, your salary has proved too small for one.

"Now, dear friend, do nothing rash. Men do not die of love. Your life is not your own, so no experiments with laudanum. Do not come to see me. My mind is fully made up. I shall travel with dear mamma, and see more of this great world than I have hitherto known. Now write me a nice letter, and tell me that I am a very sensible girl. Be brave—no nonsense, and remember that I am your ever-devoted friend,

LUCY."

"That was a nice letter to read when a fellow was hungry!"

"Did you receive it before dinner? I might have known you did by your hateful answer. Here it is:

"MY DEAR LUCY,—You are indeed a sensible girl, and I am proud of my little friend's judgment. You were always a trump. My mind is much relieved by your decision. I have often thought that perhaps we were a trifle foolish, don't you know. I didn't like to say so myself, though. You will pardon the brief character of this note when I tell you that Tom Wayland is waiting for me. We are just off to the club to dine. By-the-way, that report in regard to his sister's engagement is false. She told me so herself

this afternoon. And now, good-bye, little kitten. Be happy—but of course you will. It is the warm wish of your friend,

GREGORY.

P.S.—Regards to your mother. Appreciate her. You may not have her always."

Silence.

"What a villain!" A sigh.

A chuckle from amid the cigarette smoke.

"What fools girls are!" from the sofa. "'Tis easy to forgive them for it—as long as they're pretty. Go on. Read your answer."

She reads:

"Sir,—I have heard before of the transient nature of man's love, but allow me to assure you that I have found yours more ephemeral than any yet on record."

Interpolated chuckle from the big armchair, and vigorous response of "Wretch!" from sofa. Resumes letter:

"As for Miss Wayland, I am glad somebody finds so much to admire about her. The poor thing never had any attention before. I hope you may both be happy."

Voice from the armchair: "She was a beauty."

Voice from sofa: "She was horrid. Great big, vulgar thing."

"Go on."

"Hum! Where was I? Oh, here." Reads:

"As for my mother, she inherits her worldliness. I have not spoken to her to-day. And now, good-bye—what a word! May you forget the ruin you have wrought in a young girl's heart! I shall pray for you always. May death soon claim

LUCY.

"What a wretch you were!"

"A very clever wretch, I think."

"Was it a trick?"

"It was—and it succeeded."

MADRELINE BRIDGES.



THIS winter I am taking a rest after a round of gaiety and social activity which I never equalled before, and I doubt my going into the "swim" again next winter, or for some winters to

come, for that matter. I am desirous to explain my reasons for this withdrawal from society, and in order to do so I shall be obliged to tell you of my relations with Sir Kirby Hallum.

You see, I have always felt that it was in a sense my duty to move in good society, and I have been at some pains so to arrange my affairs and social relations as to be able to attend most of the better class of private entertainments given in London during the past two or three winters. It not only gave me no small enjoyment, but it also assisted me materially in my business.

It was a matter of considerable difficulty to secure an invitation to the Fitzwarren reception, but I managed it—no matter how—and it was at this reception that I made the acquaintance of Sir Kirby Hallum.

I had strolled into Dr. Fitzwarren's surgery to get out of the hot and crowded reception-room, and, in the dim light, was leaning against the window-casing, idly tapping on the glass with my nails, when I noticed at the top of the window-sash a bit of metal gleaming in the semi-darkness. I touched it, and found that it was a part of a burglar alarm, moving when the window was opened upon another bit of metal, and by contact completing an electric circuit of some sort.

I am something of an electrician, and my interest and curiosity were at once aroused. Without stopping to think, I unscrewed the upper bit of metal with my knife, and, after twisting off the wire which led from it into the woodwork, was examining it, when I heard a light step at the door, and looking round, found standing by the table a tall, dark-skinned man in an evening dress, with black-moustache and imperial, and long, rather curly black hair—in all suggesting at once the popular idea of his Satanic Majesty.

By one of those impulses which overcome us at all

times, I slipped the bit of metal in my pocket and turned towards the stranger, whom from his dress and manner I assumed to be one of the guests at the reception.

"I hope I don't intrude," he said politely.

"Oh no," I hastened to reply; "I am glad someone else can enjoy the coolness here."

"I think I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance," the stranger said, smiling; "as guests of this house, I trust we need no formal introduction—my name is Hallum, Sir Kirby Hallum."

"And I am William Vance; very much at your service, sir," I returned, decidedly pleased with my new friend's voice and manner. "I am indeed glad to make your acquaintance, Sir Kirby."

I found Sir Kirby Hallum a very agreeable fellow; a gentleman of refinement and culture, polished, and well-informed, a ready conversationalist, though decidedly reserved as to himself, and a smoker of excellent cigars. We discussed books, yachting, horses, politics, et cetera, Sir Kirby showing himself a man of wide reading and depth of thought along many lines.

I could learn nothing, however, of his own occupation—he was especially reticent on that point. Sir Kirby casually let slip that he had been on the Continent until recently; his business had taken him there on two days' warning, and had brought him back as suddenly; he could not tell how soon the present matter would be disposed of, or where he would go next.

"I am an uncertain fellow," he said, laughing, "and never know my own plans two weeks in advance. Indeed, my plans are largely made for me, and I go and come usually at the bidding of others."

While we were talking, Dr. Fitzwarren entered, and I did not see Sir Kirby again that evening, for, while I presently returned to the reception-room, Sir Kirby remained chatting with his host.

I was decidedly ill at ease, for I had that piece of burglar alarm in my pocket, and could find no opportunity to put it back. I was fully aware that my hasty action might be misconstrued by one who did not know me, and I was anxious lest Sir Kirby had seen me take it down, though not in the most remote way had either of us referred to the subject.

It was no business of his, though, in any case, and I deemed myself in no way bound to consult him about so trivial an affair. Besides, I was inclined to think, he had not seen me take the piece of metal. It subsequently appeared, however, that he did see me take it, and his actions were strongly influenced by the ideas this trifling incident suggested to him.

As it happened, I found no opportunity to approach the window again, and I went home with the bit of metal still in my pocket.

That night an attempt was made to rob Dr. Fitzwarren's house, the burglars entering by the very window from which I had removed the burglar alarm. They did not succeed in securing any plunder, being frightened away before any valuables were found.

Now this attempted burglary was similar to several others which had taken place at some of the finest residences in town, in each case following only a day or two after a reception—or a ball similar to that at Dr. Fitzwarren's house. As it happened, in every similar instance but one, I had been a guest at the entertainment, and I had almost begun to fear lest the people who had invited me should regard me as a bird of evil

omen, and cease to "request the honour of my presence" at their houses.

Probably you are thinking of Sir Kirby Hallum in connection with these robberies.

I must confess that I did not, though I had occasion afterwards to associate him more or less directly with all of them. I had met him but once, and for a short time only, and his name did not occur to me until two weeks later, when Lord Upton's daughter was married. At the reception, in the evening, I met the baronet again, *sauve, polite, but*, as before, suggesting Mephistopheles.

I encountered him a dozen times that evening — on the back verandah, in the conservatory, in the garden — till I began to regard him as my evil genius. Particularly did he hover in the neighbourhood of the room full of silver ware and jewellery which comprised the wedding gifts.

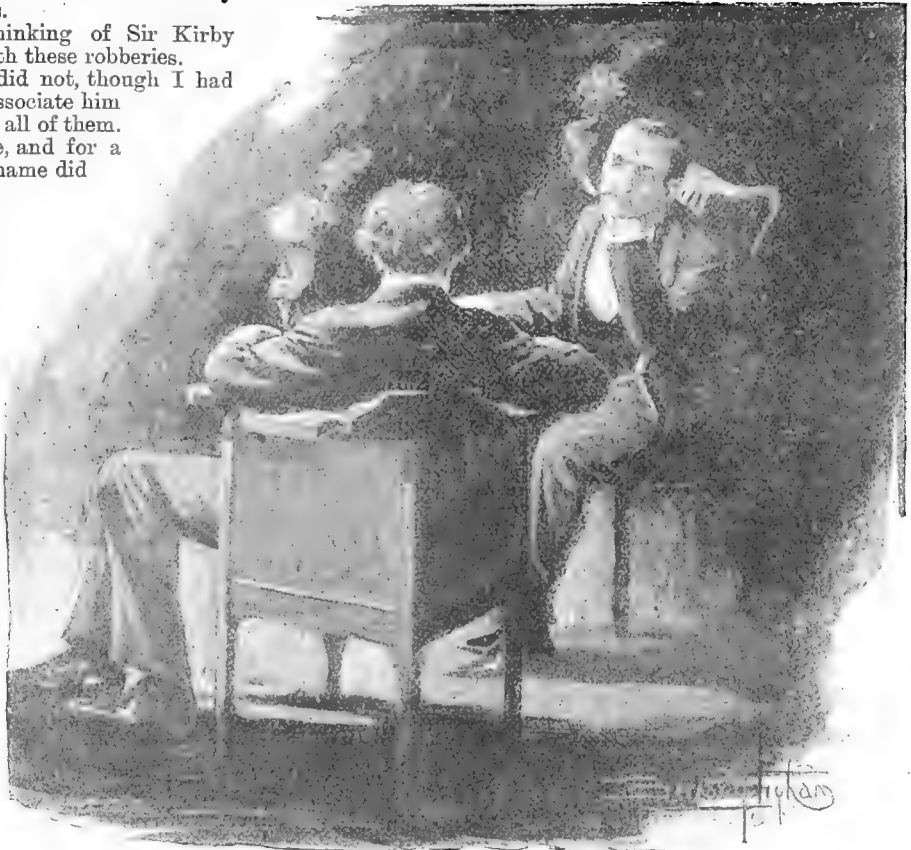
When I left the house the last person I saw was Sir Kirby, who went out with me and left me at the corner below, turning down a narrow side street with a wave of the hand and a cheery:

"Good-night, Vance."

I saw the baronet again that night, and it happened in this wise. The moon had gone down, and it was nearly three o'clock in the morning, when, with two friends, I stood in the rear of the ducal mansion, under the shadow of a large bush. I was still in evening dress, but I had a soft hat pulled down over my eyes, and wore a dark overcoat. In my hand I held a revolver, as did my two companions.

In pursuance of my project, it was only a minute's work to quietly open the door at the rear of the house and the glass door at the head of the stairs within. Two minutes later we were in the room with the wedding gifts. A dim light burnt in the chandelier, and at the other side of the room the figure of a man lay on a sofa. I slipped over to his side, and with my revolver close to his temple, signalled to my friends to begin their work.

At the first soft clink of the silver in the bag in which they were guardedly slipping the wedding gifts



I found Sir Kirby Hallum a very agreeable fellow.

the room was suddenly flooded with light, and I heard an oath from one of my companions. I turned quickly, to see Sir Kirby Hallum and three policemen standing in the doorway. I had time only to see the baronet smile triumphantly and nod in my direction, before my arms were seized from behind, the weapon wrenched from my hand, and with sharp clicks of locking handcuffs I was a prisoner. Sir Kirby then spoke:

"Hardly expected to meet again to-night, eh, Vance? You tried that burglar alarm dodge once too often, let me tell you. Gentlemen, you are my prisoners."

As I before remarked, I am now taking a rest from my social duties. I shall stay at this institution somewhat less than twelve years, and there are eight indictments, I am told, waiting to be attended to when I leave.

HARRY ROGERS.

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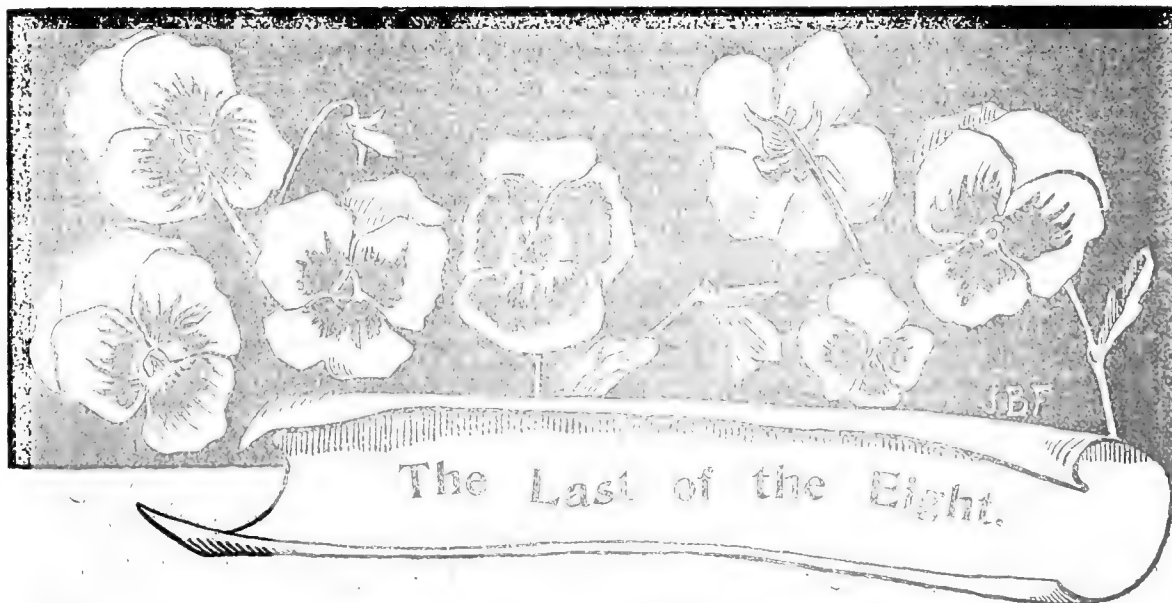
PEARSON'S + MAGAZINE.

NO. 3 OF

MELODY.

Price Sixpence each.

ON SALE ON THE FIRST OF MAY.



AHMANZADE MEHEMED, the Sirdar of the troops of Tunis, was renowned for his extraordinarily severe discipline among the soldiers under his command. "Don't fear the enemy," Mehemed used to say, "only fear Ahmanzade Mehemed, your commander." And it is recorded as a fact that his soldiers did not know such a word as fear on the battlefield, but they trembled in the presence of their general, Mehemed.

The first war in which Mehemed was engaged was against the insurrecting Greeks in Albanus, and it was in this expedition that his troops first excelled. In this campaign Mehemed ordered eight cavalymen to watch the five wells of Arta, a spot which the Greeks often visited. These eight soldiers had received strict orders to challenge every passer-by, never to close, as the saying goes, even one eye, and not to dismount on any consideration.

About midnight on the first day of their watch a driver of a waggon tried to pass by unobserved. When he saw he could not carry out his intention he left the waggon and his team of oxen and fled. The waggon was loaded with a cask, and, without dismounting, the soldiers succeeded in removing the bung, and they then soon detected from the smell that the cask contained brandy, an excellent beverage, most probably distilled from figs and raisins.

Mehemed's soldiers were not forbidden to drink confiscated liquors. They managed to get some reeds, which they inserted in the bung-hole, and began to suck the delicious brandy to their hearts' content. They never thought of the Prophet's saying that wine in any form was a wicked drink of Satan, and Satan soon saw that he had the soldiers at his mercy. First of all the soldiers were asking each other why they were sitting in their saddles when they could enjoy a much-needed rest on the lawn. Nobody would ever know if they were to dismount and to stretch their tired limbs on the grass. They could fasten their horses to the waggon, and nobody would betray them.

And they finally did lie on the lawn. The drink persuaded them to be still more incautious. Why should eight of them be watching when four would do

just as well? And a minute later were fast asleep, and the rest—well, they tried to keep the watch, but not for long. The remaining four soon argued that two would be enough to watch, and Maruf and Sefer were left to guard the wells of Arta and their comrades.

"Let me tell you," said Sefer to Maruf; "one man would do just as well as two. What do you say?"

Maruf, being of the same opinion, answered—"Let us play a game of chess. The loser must keep the watch; the winner may rest." Sefer accepted the proposition.

The two drew a chessboard on the sand. They made chess pieces out of wild pears to represent the kings, wild apples served as queens, nuts, acorns, and other things served as rooks, knights, and pawns, and the game began. At first Sefer had an advantage, but getting rather mixed up, and not being able to distinguish the pieces, he lost his queen, and was about to resign, as he could not prevent a mate in two moves. Maruf interrupted the game by exclaiming: "You are in a precarious position, Sefer."

"Yes, I know," replied the latter. "I shall be mated in two moves. I could not play well, for I am almost asleep."

"Go on, then, and asleep," said Maruf. "I shall watch for you all."

An instant later seven of the eight soldiers were fast asleep. Maruf, gun in hand, was walking to and fro after the fashion of sentinels, principally to keep sleep away. After a while he decided to sit down on the lawn. He closed his eyes, thinking that he could rely on his ears if anybody should approach, and only a few minutes had elapsed and the eight soldiers were fast asleep.

The Greeks who lay in ambush, came forth, unfastened the horses, and would have certainly have killed the Turks but for the noise made by one of the animals when led away. Maruf was the first on his legs. In an instant the eight were standing in fighting attitude, but it was useless. The Greeks had mounted the horses and laughed at the pursuing Turks. Maruf's horse, however, made it hot for the Greek who rode it. The rider was

thrown and the horse joined the eight Turks. One horse for eight cavalry-men!

"What will Mehemed have to say to this?" exclaimed the soldiers.

They knew that their lives were forfeited, but they were really more upset about the loss of their horses than about that. Sadly and timidly they returned to the camp, and, being brought before their severe commander, they made a clean breast of it. They related the story in all its details; how they had disobeyed orders by dismounting, how they fell asleep in consequence of taking too much brandy, how the two men had played a game of chess, and how they had lost the seven horses.

Ahmanzade never showed his feelings when about to speak. From his face they could not read the sentence which he was to announce, after he had listened to the story of the disobedient soldiers. At last he spoke:

"As there are eight men for one horse, seven of you are superfluous, for I never read in the Koran or in the Azorath that eight men could mount one horse. But as you are all good chess players, let a tournament decide who of you shall be the one to sit on the horse. The other seven will be shot."

He now ordered four sets of chessmen and boards to be brought to a specially appointed spot in camp, and then the eight men began a tournament in which their lives were at stake. Twelve sharpshooters were ready to carry out the sentence of death passed upon the losers. One or two weak players soon surrendered to their strong opponents; others got desperate and won their games by hazardous combinations. The four losers were at once led away, and twelve shots announced that they had paid the loss of the game with their lives.

The first round was over, and the four surviving players were now paired for another go. The excitement and the seriousness of the stakes seemed to prolong the contest. An ill-considered move, a loss of a piece or even a pawn, meant death. After a while the second round was over, two were taken away from the boards, and a few minutes later twelve shots announced in camp that two had ended their lives. Only Maruf and Sefer were left for the third and final round. Both men were known to be the best players in the regiment, and when they sat down to begin the game the excitement in the camp was at fever heat. A big crowd of soldiers was standing around them, and as the contest remained even for a long number of moves, as neither side was able to gain the least advantage in position, the spectators and players alike became so interested in the game that they forgot the seriousness of the stakes. The lookers-on nodded their appreciation when a good move was made, and discussed in low tones the position arrived at.

By-and-bye the battlefield became simplified, pieces were exchanged and pawns taken. Maruf succeeded in capturing a rook by a seemingly brilliant combination. Everybody now named Maruf as the winner.

Sefer, upon losing that important piece, studied a

long time. Maruf, who thought he had the man beaten, did not look at the board—that is to say, his mind was occupied with other thoughts. Sefer did not move, but still kept looking at the position, and Maruf again directed his attention to the board. As he did so he became as pale as death, and he trembled all over. He suddenly perceived that, in spite of his numerical advantage of pieces, his game was hopeless. He saw not that if Sefer sacrificed his queen for a rook, he could then effect a mate by means of a bishop. "Will he see the combination?" Maruf said to himself. The answer of this question meant death or life. Maruf realised in an instant Sefer was aware of the situation. Maruf wondered why did he not make the move. But Sefer's thoughts were no longer given to the game, but to some other subject altogether. At last the silence was broken.

"Maruf," said Sefer, "how many children have you at home?"

"Four," came the reply, in a trembling voice.

"Your wife will shortly present you with another child?"

"Yes."

"Have you a good wife?"

"She is faithful and good," answered Maruf, while the tears were rolling down all over his face.

Sefer put his hand to his forehead, murmured something like a prayer, and asked for a dish of water. When this was brought he washed his hands and his face and addressed his adversary thus: "You have always been a good comrade. Last night you did not make me keep watch, although I lost the game to you." Then he touched the bishop and not the queen. A few moves later Maruf gave a check, the crowd of bystanders solemnly cried "mate" in a chorus: Maruf was proclaimed as victor.

Sefer got up, shook hands with his late antagonist, beckoned to the sharpshooters who stood in readiness, and two minutes later Sefer's noble heart had ceased to beat.

Maruf, however, remained at the chess-board. He stared at the pieces as if absent-minded, and later he tried in vain to place the pieces in a certain position. He placed black and white men into altogether impossible positions, and then he kept staring at the board.

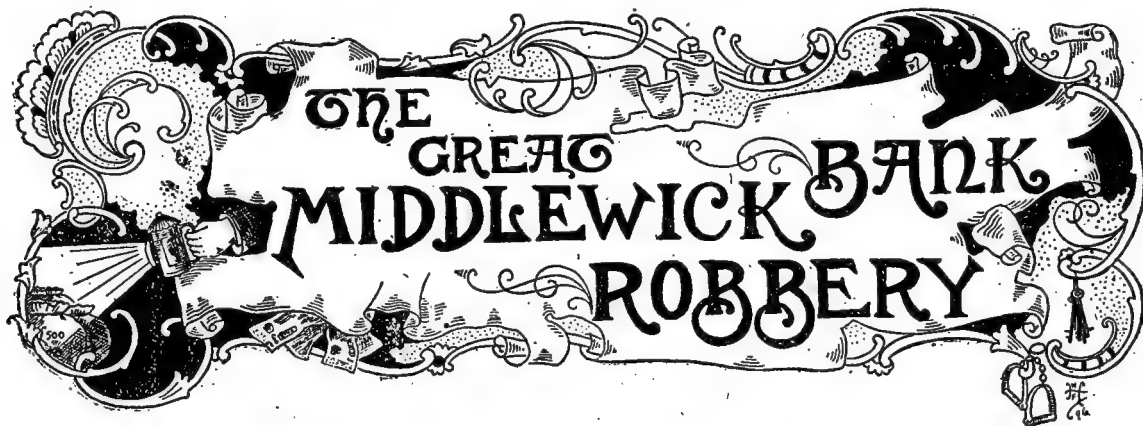
"Get up," commanded Ahmanzade, who has been a witness throughout the tournament. "Mount your horse; your life is spared."

Maruf, however, did not heed the words of his commander; he still kept looking at the board, making all sorts of silly moves, and winding up with an outburst of laughter. Then he wept bitterly for a while. "How stupid these pieces look," he then said; "one is a horse, the other wears a turban."

"Lead him away," ordered Mehemed. Two soldiers took him away. Maruf stared like a madman. The surroundings seemed strange to him. He looked round, still absent-minded, and what he said was unintelligible. His last game of chess had made him mad.

MORITZ JOKAI.





THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADVENTURE AND A MISADVENTURE.

AFTER leaving Jack Burton on the afternoon preceding the last attempt upon the Middlewick Bank, his friend Taylor had strolled off in the direction of the hotel.

It will be remembered that a plain understanding had been come to between the two men as to the respective parts they were to play in the events that were then only a few hours distant.

It was growing dusk when Taylor walked into the coffee-room, in the doorway of which he encountered a man coming out whom he recognised as Roberts. Neither showed the least sign of recognition, and Taylor, for his own part, was convinced that therein Roberts was not acting a part.

In the most natural manner the detective turned and watched the criminal, who crossed the street and turned to the left. Determined to keep him in sight, Taylor did the same, keeping sufficiently in the rear to prevent his errand being suspected in case the other should look round or retrace his steps.

Roberts' course convinced his follower that he did not know he was being shadowed. The one in advance continued onward, turning several corners until he speedily reached the outskirts of the small town. This fact added to the delicacy of the work Taylor had taken upon himself, for both were soon practically alone.

Believing he was on the eve of an important discovery, the pursuer held back until he could hardly distinguish the shadowy form as it moved forward at a moderate walk. About a hundred yards ahead, to the right, among a clump of trees, the detective fancied he saw the outlines of a house. He had never been in that vicinity before, but like a flash he associated the building with the business of the man whom he was following.

He was right. Roberts turned sharply to the right, and came more plainly into view as he walked along what seemed to be the remainder of a path and disappeared in the gloom of the trees.

"That old building is the burglars' headquarters," was the detective's conclusion. "I wish my lord the watchman was with me, but as it is I'll investigate for myself."

Nothing would have been more imprudent than to follow directly in Roberts' footsteps. He and his friends were sure to be on the alert, and would discover Taylor the moment he turned to follow their confederate. Accordingly, the detective walked past the building, hardly turning his head when opposite, though it is needless to say he used his eyes to the utmost.

It was as he supposed. A low, broad stone building stood in the grove, a structure that had probably been built before any of the houses in the present town of Middlewick. It

was unoccupied, except by the men who had taken possession while planning the robbery of the bank.

A short distance to the rear of the building wound a brook that was lined with trees. The stream was several feet below the level of the surrounding land, and, crossing the road, was crossed in turn by Taylor, after passing further along the highway. A little way in this direction brought the wooded hollow between him and the old house, thus affording the screen necessary in carrying out the plan he had formed.

Taylor vaulted over the fence, hurried along the edge of the wood, and in a few minutes was behind the structure that had assumed so much interest for him. He found that between it and the nearest point of the hollow was an open space of a hundred feet in extent. The grass-grown plot had to be crossed in order to reach the building itself.

A nearer view of the old stone building left no doubt as to its great age. It had probably been deserted for the past twenty years, and no doubt was in a dilapidated condition. The surrounding trees were so scattered that, despite their exuberant vegetation at that season of the year, the structure was seen distinctly.

Nothing, however, could be effected without a closer view. From where the detective stood not a sign of life was observable. All the windows were dark, and the stillness of the tomb rested on the scene.

Taylor was not the man to hesitate when once he had decided upon his course of action. With his head bent as low as possible, he ran rapidly and lightly across the open space and entered the grove immediately surrounding the old house. With the utmost care he made a circuit of the building, coming back to the point from which he started. The shadows gave him good protection, for the moon had not yet risen.

Not the slightest sign of life was observed during his circumnavigation of the mysterious building. That one man, at least, was inside, he was certain.

While still debating upon the right course to take, he heard the sound of voices. Taylor stealthily shifted his position in the direction whence came the murmur, and saw three men approaching from the highway over the same course that had been followed by Roberts a short time before.

There could be no mistake as to their identity; they were Joe Nash, Will King, and Sam Birch. They entered the broad, tumble-down front door, and then followed the sound of several voices in conversation, though nothing that was said could be identified.

Then a singular occurrence took place. A light flashed to view in the large middle room on the lower floor. It need hardly be said that the windows were without curtains, and most of the panes were gone. There were two windows opening on the right, and the same number on the left.

On one of the other sides of the room a door communicated with the kitchen, and on the remaining side, with the broad hall leading to the front door.

Joe Nash found some sort of a seat at one of the windows on the left, and Will King did the same on the right. This, it will be seen, commanded every possible view of the outside and shut off any attempt on the part of Taylor playing eavesdropper by slipping forward and crouching under one of the windows.

Evidently the two had taken these positions to make sure that no one should steal a march upon them. Birch and Roberts kept away from the windows and nearer the middle of the room, since there was no occasion for them to help their comrades watch.

Only two alternatives remained to the detective, to enter the building from the back or the front. A brave man might well shrink from either attempt, for it was virtually entering the lion's den, with every chance on the side of the lion. But Taylor decided to take the risk.

Favoured by the gloom among the trees, he easily passed beyond sight of the watchmen at the windows, and approached the kitchen part of the building. An old door, with a single stone step, opened into this, the interior of the kitchen being in utter darkness.

A few minutes' examination revealed the old form of entrance. Instead of the modern latch or lock, a string dangled through an aperture that had probably been bored a century before. As in the days of our forefathers, a twitch of the latch-string opened the way into the building, while the door was locked by drawing in the string.

Taylor softly pulled the leathern thong and the latch was lifted. When he pushed against the door, however, there was no yielding. He tried it until convinced it was fastened on the inside by some other means.

Hobson's choice remained: he must enter by the front, or leave without accomplishing anything.

With a temerity approaching foolhardiness, the detective set about his perilous task. His action was almost a crime, inasmuch as there was no necessity for any such frightful personal risk as he now took upon himself. The programme for the evening had been made out. It was certain that these four men would try to rob the Middlewick Bank before the rising of the morrow's sun. The measures intended to defeat them had been agreed upon; it was not necessary to know more, to say nothing of the great risk Taylor ran of upsetting everything by his rashness.

With hardly a moment's hesitation he set about his task. Two broad, flat stones served as the steps to the front entrance. Here the massive door was ordinarily opened and shut by the old-fashioned iron latch, below which, on the inside, were the huge bolts and cross-pieces by which the entrance was rendered almost as secure as the solid walls themselves.

The criminals within might well think it unnecessary to lock the outer door. Surely no one would attempt to enter by that means, while any other approach would be detected at once. The rear being secured, they might well believe that anything they said was safe against eavesdroppers.

Taylor was on the alert for the sound of anyone moving within. If he could not avoid alarming the four conspirators, he could dash down the weedy walk to the highway, and thence in the direction of the town. The plotters would hardly dare to follow him, and if they did he was confident of surpassing their best efforts.

With the utmost care he raised the latch and held it suspended under the pressure of his thumb. So far as he could tell, not the slightest sound was produced. Then he pushed the door open. It moved backwards as if the hinges had been newly oiled. The darkness of the wide hall was before him, while a yellow line of light along the floor showed the closed door leading to the large room where the four men were seated.

He not only heard them laugh and speak, but distinguished several of the words that were uttered. It looked as if fate were favouring him. With the utmost

care he managed to close the door as noiselessly as he had opened it. Although he was in a place he had never before seen, and with the impenetrable darkness on every hand, he had a general idea of his surroundings and of the right thing to do.

It must not be supposed that Taylor did not comprehend the risk he was running by his daring act. Sooner or late the four men would complete their council and leave the building, to do which they must come through the hall along which he was advancing like a cat. If they made this move suddenly they would be upon him before he could escape. In a conflict with four such desperate men he could have not the slightest chance. If he should attempt to run he would become the target for all their revolvers before he could reach the highway.

But Taylor indulged in some exceeding close theorising. Hours must pass before a move was made against the bank. Nothing was more likely than that the quartette meant to stay where they were until eleven o'clock, if not later. If for any reason they changed their minds, or had already formed a different intention, the listener would be able to gain ample notice of it from their conversation.

This was the theory that sustained him while advancing with the caution of one who feels that every moment may be his last.

When almost close enough to touch the inner door the detective stopped. He had gone so near that every word uttered was intelligible. He even withdrew a step or two towards the entrance.

As may be supposed, the conversation was extremely interesting to the man who had run all this risk to overhear it.

It was Joe Nash who said:

"It doesn't look as if a single person in the town suspects us. I've kept my eyes open ever since we've been here and seen nothing."

"Why should you?" asked Will King, "when it isn't to be seen. This is the finest job we've had for a long time. I was in the bank to-day, and had a good look at the safe."

"What sort is it?" asked Birch.

"The old-fashioned kind; it's as easy to open as a sardine tin."

"Do you s'pose there's much in there?"

"Enough to pay us, if we get hold of it."

"I came up last week, you know," observed Roberts, "and looked round. It took some time to learn what I wanted to know, but I found it out at last. Whom do you suppose this old hulk belongs to?"

The others could not guess.

"The old watchman at the bank. I met him the other day, when he was having a look at it, and got him to show me over it by pretending I thought of buying it. He said it was built by his great-grandfather, or some one, and that nobody has lived in it for twenty-five years. He's been trying to sell it for a long time, but no one will buy it at any price."

"You managed to get the provisions in here without any one seeing you, Roberts?"

"Oh, yes, that was easy enough after I'd learned all the ins and outs of the old building. I could stroll out this way after dark and leave a little of the stuff at a time. Besides, drinkables are more in our lines than eatables, so that made less trouble, you see."

"Especially when you carried most of the drinkables inside," was the facetious observation of Sam Birch.

"Of course I brought them inside, all of them, and I notice you've done your share in placing yourself outside them."

"Well, I think we can all plead guilty to that," was Birch's comment.

"Then," said Nash, "it is understood that as soon as the job's over we all come back here and stay for several days."

"You think that's the best plan?"

"By long chalks; the news will be telegraphed to-morrow to London, and the detectives will be on the look-out for us at all points. They will watch the railway station, scour the country and hunt everywhere—except here in this old building in this old town."

"The safest place after cracking a safe," philosophised Sam Birch, "is in the house next door."

"We will keep out of sight; that is, all except Roberts, who mustn't clear off too suddenly, and then when the way is clear steal off one by one and come together, as we get the chance, at the Hole in the Wall."

Taylor, who did not lose a word of this edifying conversation, felt that he was being repaid for his risk.

"Roberts is the master of ceremonies," added Joe Nash, "and is used to the business, so he need not make any mistake."

"Suppose there's a slip to-night."

"There won't be. That watchman is the stupidest dolt I ever met; we won't have any trouble with him, and that's all we need fear."

"Shall we drink to the success of the scheme?" asked Birch.

"No," was Nash's prompt reply. "We must have no muddled brains to-night. You've got to stand watch, and mustn't see double."

"But after the job's over and we are here, what then?"

"Then will be time enough to drink to the success of what we have done, not of what is left to do."

"And we are to stay here until it's time to move?"

"That's the idea."

At that moment the listening detective fancied he heard the door leading into the kitchen open. The noise was slight, but it disturbed him. He stood a few seconds, hesitating whether to withdraw or stay. He ought to have gone, for surely he had learned sufficient, but the words of the party proved they intended to wait several hours, and, unfortunately, he decided to listen a little longer.

"It's tedious business," said Birch.

"D'you know of anything that pays better?" was the pert inquiry of Nash. "You ought to understand that one of the virtues of our profession is patience."

Just then the detective heard a faint disturbance at the door behind him. He turned his head, but of course could see nothing in the gloom, nor did he detect any additional sound.

"I've stayed too long," was his conclusion, as he moved with less care than before along the hall.

Seizing the latch he drew it smartly backwards. The door did not respond. He tried harder than before, but it did not yield the fraction of an inch.

Convinced of treachery, he turned to ascend the stairs, which his sense of feeling told him ran up one side of the hall; but before he could reach them, the inner door was opened and a stream of light swept over him. In the blinding glare he saw himself confronted by three men, each with a levelled weapon, and he recognised the gruff command of Nash:

"Don't move!"

Even while the words were uttered the outer door also opened behind him, and Roberts approached from the rear.

Taylor was fairly caught, and had no choice but to obey. He did so with that promptness which he always demanded from members of the criminal professions when he held them at a similar disadvantage.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW ROBERTS MADE A DISTRESSING DISCOVERY.

By what means the four criminals discovered the presence of the detective in the hall outside was never ascertained. Probably he made some slight noise that betrayed him, for the descent upon the startled officer was so overwhelming, surrounded as he was on all sides, that he had no choice but to submit as a prisoner.

Taylor knew how to bow gracefully to the inevitable. He

remained stock still, until Joe Nash—the others holding their weapons ready—stepped forward and disarmed him.

Having satisfied himself that the captive had no more weapons about him, they all returned together to the room where a couple of candles were burning on the broad mantel-piece.

Taylor walked to the middle of the room, turned round, and, with a smile, lifted his hat, bowed, and said:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. How are you all? I hope I see you well."

"Alfred Taylor!" was the exclamation of Joe Nash, who was the first to recognise the famous detective. "What are you doing here?"

"Awaiting your pleasure, gentlemen," was the imper-turbable reply.

But this facetiousness was wasted on these men. They were filled with wrath that the interloper should have followed them to their chosen retreat. Each man held his weapon in hand, and the scowling, threatening looks they cast upon the prisoner boded ill to him.

"We don't want any nonsense from you. If you know what's best for you, you'll answer our questions truthfully."

"I can't answer them before they are asked."

"What brought you to this out-of-the-way place?"

"I saw my friend Roberts strolling in this direction, and having nothing special on hand, thought it would be interesting to follow him. I did so; came in at the front door, and employed myself listening to your entertaining conversation."

"How much did you hear?" demanded Nash.

Had Taylor attempted to deceive these men by pretending he had just come and had not caught enough words to give him any knowledge of their scheme, every one of the four would have known he was speaking untruthfully. It could not have helped him, and was likely to work him injury.

"I have not been here long, but long enough to hear, as I judge, about all that was worth hearing. I understand you have arranged to crack the vault of the Middlewick Bank to-night, and that you intend to stay in this old house until the hue and cry is over."

There was the whole thing in a nutshell. What more could they ask?

"What brings you in Middlewick at the same time with us?"

This was an important question, and, as will be observed, the detective's reply was straightforward, even though misleading.

"I was sent for to look into another matter."

"What was it?"

"That I cannot tell you, for it would be unbusinesslike. I pledge you my word, however, that it has not the remotest connection with any of you. You can well understand that, when I say I have been in Middlewick the best part of two days, and had no suspicion when I came that any one of you had ever been in the town. Indeed, it is less than two hours since I accidentally laid eyes upon Roberts."

The criminals were inclined to believe this statement.

"Well," said Nash, "we've got you here, and that bank is to be cracked to-night. What do you suppose we are going to do with you?"

Taylor shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd like to know myself, but I shall have to wait until you choose to tell me."

"There's only one thing to do," interposed Roberts, who in some respects was the worst of the party.

A suggestive movement of his pistol left no doubt as to his meaning. A word from the leader would have caused Roberts to carry out his own wishes, and he would have done it, too, with pleasure.

But here was the problem. To release the prisoner would destroy the scheme they had elaborated with so much care and place every one of the four in peril, for the detective would be certain to turn his liberty to the best account without delay.

Taylor knew there was not one of these four who would hesitate to shoot a man in the way of self-defence, or when it became necessary to insure the success of an enterprise. Their previous history had proven that. There was only one of them, however, who was prepared to kill a detective when it was not absolutely necessary. That one was Roberts. He had followed his profession long enough to look upon all officers of the law as his mortal enemies. He specially detested Alfred Taylor, who had for months carried a warrant for his arrest and was suspected of holding similar papers relating to one or more other members of the party.

The question presented itself as to what was to be done with the officer to prevent his interfering with their plans. Taylor would have given him parole and respected it, but the ruffians were too suspicious to take any chances like that.

"Dead men tell no tales," added Roberts. "If you fellows are afraid to undertake the job I'll do it myself."

"Let me have my pistol," said Taylor, "and I'll be pleased to stand up in front of that coward."

But Roberts had no intention of settling the question in that fashion.

While Nash was as merciless as Roberts, he looked ahead. The disappearance of so widely known an officer as Alfred Taylor would be certain to be discovered sooner or later, followed by a strong probability that the crime would be brought home to them. That was liable to produce unpleasant consequences.

While the discussion was going on Nash took a candle from the mantelpiece, and said to King:

"Come with me."

He led the way down the stone steps to the cellar, the door of which was at the side of the room. Pausing at the bottom, Nash held the light above his head and looked round.

It was a spacious apartment, and, like most of the old-fashioned ones, wholly below ground. The two small windows, which lighted it by day, opened into little excavations dug on the outside, and neither window was large enough to allow any animal larger than a cat to crawl through.

All the walls were a foot in thickness. The only possible egress was through the door at the head of the steps by which they had descended into the cellar.

"What do you think of it?" asked Nash of his companion.

"It will do; it couldn't be more secure, but what about the door at the top of the steps?"

"Some one will have to stand guard there."

"Who shall it be?"

"Roberts."

"But he'll shoot the prisoner."

"What of that? We'll be away when it's done."

"I understand," replied King with a nod of his head.

"All right. Then let's get upstairs again."

On their return to the room where Taylor and their two friends were waiting, Nash announced his decision.

"It won't do to let this young man loose till we've finished our business. The cellar looks pretty strong. Mr. Taylor will oblige by going down to the steps and staying there for a few days. In case he should be lonely, Roberts will stay in the building to keep him company and see that he doesn't get into mischief. Roberts, you're at liberty to do that as you think best. When Mr. Taylor returns to his friends he isn't likely to boast about this affair."

No, indeed; could the detective ever recall the episode without mortification? Never was an officer more perfectly checkmated.

"Good-evening, gentlemen, and may your scheme for to-night be confounded."

Taylor, hat in hand, bowed to the party, walked to the head of the stairs and coolly descended into the darkness below. His imprisonment had begun.

Roberts was disposed at first to protest against the

leader's arrangement, for it eliminated him from all active participation in the unlawful business wherein such a distinctive part had been assigned to him.

But the scheme, after all, commended itself to him in more than one respect. In the first place, he was the most cowardly member of the company. He saw that if by any chance their scheme was overthrown, his position would be far more favourable than that of the rest of the party. His confederates were bound to protect each other to the last extremity, and, if the worst came to the worst, he could prove an alibi at the time of the burglary.

Then, again, he was to have charge of his most execrated enemy; that triumph was worth much. So he assented to the scheme.

The understanding was that the three men should leave the old stone house about eleven o'clock, each making their way to the bank by a different route. Birch was to take the lead, signalling to them as near midnight as possible if the coast was clear.

How this plan, supplemented by the complete overthrow of all their arrangements, was carried into effect is already known.

Thus it came about that Roberts found himself the only member of the party in the building, before midnight. He sat in the upper room, where he had been left by his companions with the candles burning and with his prisoner downstairs. He had given his own weapon to Will King, retaining for his own use the detective's revolver.

The door leading to the cellar, like all the rest in the old house, was much more massive and strong than is generally the case in houses of more modern style. It opened inwards, and was secured by means of a powerful iron bolt. Its position, protecting it from the weather, caused it to be much better preserved than the other doors.

The situation of the prisoner could hardly have been more secure. The single door by which he could escape was the one just mentioned. Since that opened into the cellar, it could be moved only by pulling it towards him. Thus assurance was made doubly sure, as any idea the detective might have of breaking it down by forcing it open with his shoulder was effectually done away with.

On the other hand, Roberts was at a great advantage. He was armed, while the prisoner was weaponless. It cannot be known what sinister designs assumed form in the treacherous depths of the miscreant's heart. Probably he contemplated an excuse for shooting the helpless officer, but was deterred by the fear of consequences.

Taylor's body might not be found for weeks, but one fact could be brought home to Roberts; he had visited the house a short time before the detective's disappearance, and represented to Warren that he was considering the purchase of the structure. Trifling as was this incident, it would be made to connect him with the crime, and he shuddered to think what the ultimate end of the other detective's work would assuredly be.

No; much as he might wish to put Taylor out of the way, he was afraid to do it. He would leave him in his underground prison without food or water, there to perish for aught his gaoler cared; but further than that he dare not go.

For fully half-an-hour the ruffian turned over in his mind a scheme for making a bargain with his prisoner by which the latter should pledge himself to drop all proceedings against him. The trouble about this, however, was that Roberts was powerless to offer the only terms the detective was likely to accept, since he dare not release him.

Roberts shrank from any attempt to take the papers from his man by force. Although a bigger built man than Taylor, he knew that his mode of life would give him the advantage. But the decisive point against the whole thing was that any papers obtained forcibly could not be of the slightest possible benefit to Roberts. Furthermore, it was likely that all documents which concerned the criminal were at the hotel where Taylor had been stopping.

It was natural that Roberts should feel curious as to the way in which his prisoner was passing his time in the gloom

below. He could hear nothing, though he stood by the door several times listening for sounds from below.

He returned to his seat, lighted a cigar, and, looking up at the candles, awaited his friends' return. He calculated that this would not be for some time yet, as the bank job would employ them for some considerable time. At the end of three hours, perhaps, one or more of them would be back at the stone building.

It was now one o'clock, as a glance at his watch showed, and surely never had the minutes seemed longer. He assumed the easiest position he could in the unfurnished room, and, despite the many stirring thoughts which filled his mind, dropped asleep.

When he woke the morning light was shining through the broken window. The night had passed.

As soon as he recalled his wandering senses he sprang up and dashed to the door at the head of the cellar stairs. A second's examination proved it had not been opened, and showed no signs of disturbance. The iron bolt was in place, and Hercules himself could not have had forced it from the other side. Roberts listened, but all was silent below. Nevertheless, he knew his man was there, for he had not passed through the only avenue of escape that it was possible to use.

But what meant the absence of Nash, King, and Birch? They ought to have returned hours ago. Could anything have gone amiss? Roberts grew faint at the thought, but no other explanation presented itself. His anxiety became a torment to him. He peeped out of the window, but saw only a farmer driving along the highway.

He could stand it no longer. He must find out what it all meant.

But the prisoner below stairs—what would become of him? Roberts knew of the two windows which let in a few streaks of daylight. They were too small to help Fagan. No; the door must be used, and that alone. The criminal now examined the fastenings once more. There was no way of making them more secure. In fact they were as strong as the entrance to the penitentiary from which he had had so much trouble in escaping several years before.

"He won't dare approach the door as long as he thinks I am on the watch," was Roberts' belief, "so I will let him continue to believe I am at my post."

This was easily done. He slipped out at the back of the house on tiptoe, and then reached the highway by a roundabout course which precluded all possibility of the detective seeing him had he attempted to use the small windows.

Pulling himself together, Roberts walked as briskly as was prudent towards Middlewick, with eyes and ears alert. He did not have to go far before his worst fears were realised. The whole town knew of, and were talking about, the attempted burglary of the bank. All three of the men concerned had been captured, and were at that moment securely lodged in the county gaol.

"Heavens!" muttered the startling Roberts, "suppose I had been with the boys last night! They would have nabbed me, too. I think the best thing I can do is to make myself scarce."

But instead of yielding to this natural impulse, he mustered enough courage to stand his ground. Moreover he began stirring himself on behalf of his unfortunate comrades. He visited them in gaol, under the pretence of being a lawyer, engaged the services of the first attorney in Middlewick in the hopeless case, and left no stone unturned that promised the slightest hope.

Roberts was shrewd enough to discover one important fact. Taylor was not the only detective concerned in baffling the burglars. Some one besides him, and possessing greater skill than he, had taken a hand.

Who this man was Roberts did not know, though he meant to find out in the course of the day. Well aware that he himself would be an object of interest, if not of suspicion, he resorted to the common artifice of leaving the town, only to return stealthily later in the evening.

It was he who, prowling in the neighbourhood of Mr.

Bryant's house, was attracted by Rutherford's movements, and held his home for a short time under surveillance, with no well defined idea of what he hoped to accomplish by that course.

Roberts' absence from town for the afternoon prevented his ascertaining the identity of the detective who had entrapped the burglars so cleverly, but he was certain of learning before the passing of the next day.

Roberts went back to the hotel and repeated his visit to Alf Taylor's room, and while engaged in examining the missing detective's luggage, discovered, though not by any means in the way he had intended, the identity of the second detective engaged in solving the bank mystery.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM COMPETITION.

SECOND SERIES.

Of the thousands of competitors in the second series of the BRAIN GYMNASIUM, fifty-five succeeded in correctly answering every one of the twenty problems set. The amount offered in Prizes was £12 10s., to which we have added another 25s., in order that a fair division may be made, and each correct competitor therefore receives 5s.

As the problems were originally set in *The Story Teller*, it would scarcely be fair to the readers of *Short Stories* to occupy space in the latter paper by publishing a full key. Therefore, on this occasion, the solutions will not appear.

These competitions have proved so popular that it has been decided to continue them in *Short Stories*, and the first set of problems will appear next week.

The advent of this competition will in no way affect the continuance of the PICTURE PUZZLE.

A postal order for five shillings has been forwarded to each of the following persons:

C. E. Bullock, 88, Coburg Buildings, Fancis Street, Victoria; T. O. Jowett, 36, Hargwyne Street, Stockwell, London; C. B. Keston, 11, Queen's Road, Bayswater, W.; J. Gillespie, 105, St. Michael's Street, Dumfries; J. R. T. Hill, 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead, N.B.; Miss A. Hammon, 23, Thornhill Crescent, Barnsbury; Mrs. M. E. Nennie, 99, Queen Street, Peterhead; Miss G. Bond, Southbrook, Budleigh Salterton, South Devon; W. J. Griffith, Mount Pleasant, Gettin's Street, Oswestry; R. M. Brown, Silcoke, Claremont Road, Highgate; H. J. C. Davies, 23, Haselrigge Road, Clapham; W. S. Cool, 28, Thirsk Road, Lavender Hill; T. Griffiths, 3, Chesnut Avenue, Normanton Road, Derby; Miss Niblett, Ecclesfield, Ashford, Middlesex; H. Blackburn, 7, Airdale Crescent, Otley Road, Bradford, Yorks; C. H. Beech, 219, Gt. Cheetham Street, Higher Broughton, Manchester; W. McDermott, Custom House, Southampton; T. P. Burton, 69, Grosvenor Road, Camberwell; Miss H. Backwell, 11, Peak Hill Gardens, Sydenham; G. Thomson, 59, Stanmore Road, Glasgow; W. Buchan, 9, Romford Road, Stratford; A. Gresham, 30, Bradstock Road, South Hackney; A. M. Trivess, 4, Graham Road, Southsea, Hants; W. G. Cool, 28, Thirsk Road, Lavender Hill; R. Paterson, 11, Vere Street, London, W.; Miss E. Hill, Fairlaw, Castlennan, Barnes; Miss E. Murray, 44, Shelgate Road, Clapham Junction; C. E. Kaye, St. Andrew's Lodge, Victoria Road, Worthing; H. Coles, 37, Walnut Street, Southport; F. C. Smith, 77, Elm Grove, Brighton; G. W. Young, 20, Claremont Square, Pentonville, London; E. G. Darvill, 87, Bristol Road, East Ham; W. Jackson, 11, Pedworth Road, Keymouth Road, Rotherhithe; Mrs. Griffith, 23, Gittin's Street, Oswestry, Salop; C. J. Payne, 50, Matcham Road, Leytonstone, E.; G. H. Perry, 127, Elizabeth Road, Upton Park, Essex; W. H. Deeble, 25, Arvenach Street, Falmouth; A. J. Whitworth, Manston, Mason's Avenue, Croydon; B. C. Smythe, St. Ann's House, Lewis; P. J. Duncan, Woodville, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth; A. Grigg, 23, Church Street, Edgware Road; Mrs. R. W. Blund, 29, Bridge Road, Hammer-smith; T. Bessant, 15, Eton Place, Falmouth; Miss B. Stagg, St. Paul's Street, Milton, Sittingbourne; E. H. Mounickendam, 175, Gloucester Road, Regent's Park; J. Young; Ivy Cottage, St. John's, Woking, Surrey; Mrs. J. Jenkins, 15, Castle Street, Barry, Glam.; J. Shearer, Overlea, Busby, Glasgow; S. W. Burgess, Halse, near Taunton; P. Sweeney, 124, Hartnup Street, Anfield, Liverpool; P. W. Millard, 29, Patshull Road, Kentish Town; J. Thain, 35, Noel Street, Islington; W. Caird, 12, Franklin Street, South Tottenham; Miss E. S. Anderson, 250, King's Road, Kingston Hill; H. J. Wray, 15, Cemetery Road, East Durham, Norfolk.

POSTAL RATES.

SHORT STORIES will be sent direct from these offices, post free, to any country within the Postal Union, at the following rates, prepaid:

One Year	...	...	...	...	6s. 6d.
Half Year	...	...	...	...	3s. 3d.
Three Months	...	...	...	...	1s. 8d.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

SUPER-EMINENT.—The Queen's Royal Household Prudential, Eclipse, and Alarm Carpets and Hearthrugs, (C. Regd.). Amazingly interesting, instructive, and detailed Grand Reduction Catalogue post free, if, when writing, you mention this paper.

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a Carpet for the money. Be this as it may, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 6ft.—even for 2/11. **TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.**

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

(Registered). **GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.**

Sale Price This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, the largest ever sold at the Price.

2/11 Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Portered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profit. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet, 10s. extra.

SPECIAL OFFER. 2 Carpets and 2 Rugs ... 7s. 3d. Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

Satisfaction Guaranteed. DO NOT MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY. IT MAY NOT OCCUR AGAIN.

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON, 2/5/96.

On receipt of this Coupon and P.O. or Stamp for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. Cheques and P.O.'s payable to

F. HODGSON AND SON, Manufacturers, Importers, and Merchants,
WOODSLEY ROAD, LEEDS.

Telegraphic Address—"Eclipse, Leeds."

Telephone No. 918.

"THE NIMBLE 9^D."

Great Reduction in price to 9d. per lb. in order to reduce stock, but

QUALITY GOOD AS EVER.

NEARLY 100,000 BEDS ALREADY SOLD

TO THOROUGHLY SATISFIED PURCHASERS.

NEWHAM'S LINCOLNSHIRE

FEATHER BEDS

THESE BEDS are warranted doubly purified, dusted, and perfected in our own extensive factory at Boston, Lincs., made in strong linen bordered tick. The quality, sweetness, and purity of every bed guaranteed. These beds ALWAYS GIVE SATISFACTION, and many thousands of purchasers have sent us flattering testimonials and other orders for beds. Note following prices, which are 25 per cent. less than our recently advertised prices.

No. 1.—Single Bed, Bolster and Pillow, 6ft. 6in. by 3ft. 6in., weighing 40lb. ...	30/-
No. 2.—Double Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 4ft. 6in., weighing 55lb. ...	37/6
No. 3.—Double Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 4ft. 6in., weighing 55lb. ...	41/3
No. 4.—Extra Size Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 5ft., weighing 65lb. ...	48/9

Any sized Bed only 9d. per lb., Carriage Paid, to any station in the United Kingdom. FEATHERS ONLY 9d. PER LB. The trade supplied. All orders must be accompanied by cheque or P.O.O. (which, as security to purchasers, may be post-dated ten days). Send for samples of Feathers and Ticks, Price Lists, etc., which will be sent Post Free and need not be returned. A great reduction on three or more Beds. Please mention this paper.

S. S. NEWHAM & CO., Boston, Lincolnshire.

HAVE YOU A POST-CARD?

If not, please obtain one, and send it to

THE PEARSON POTTERY CO., HANLEY,

with your name and address on the back, and you will receive by next post full particulars of the most wonderful package of crockery the world has ever seen.

100 PIECES

FOR

£1 1s.



100 PIECES

FOR

£1 1s.

A Dinner Service of 50 pieces is included, which is guaranteed to be worth the guinea alone, and a China Tea Service of 28 pieces, finished in gold, together with a lot of useful kitchen crockery.

The Secret of the Success.—The Pearson Pottery Company are manufacturers, not middlemen, like many other advertisers. The Pearson Potteries have nearly 2,000ft. frontage to the town of Hanley.

Thousands sold all over the world. Everybody not only satisfied but amazed at the quantity and quality given.

Hundreds of these packages are applied for as **Wedding or Birthday Presents**, And what more useful present can be given? Every item is useful.

Post-cards and Letters to be addressed to the

PEARSON POTTERY COMPANY, HANLEY.

ALWAYS READY FOR FIRE.

"Yes, sir, you will find one of those things, all ready for instant use, on every floor in the house. The fireman would answer a call right on the jump, sir, of course. We know that, but with our own hose we might prevent a fire from gaining headway, or even put it out before they could arrive. Anyhow, we think it prudent to have this arrangement, even if the law didn't require it."

So said the manager of a big London hotel to the writer not long ago. He was obviously right. There are no two sides to that question in the eyes of any sensible person. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We all agree to that, yet how many of us habitually shape the principle into practice? Not many, I am afraid.

"I always keep a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup in the house," says a woman in a recent letter, "and if any of my family ail anything a few doses sets us right." Yes, she does *now*, but there was a time when she did not, and for a good and sufficient reason: she had not heard of it. After she heard of it, and found out its value, you could never catch her without it. The big apple of wisdom grows only on the tree of experience.

"Up to the early part of the year 1885," she says, "I had always enjoyed good health, and had no occasion for doctors or medicines. At that time I began to suffer from an illness which, after a little time, seemed to involve my whole system. My appetite at first was fitful and variable, and I had no proper desire or relish for my meals. After eating I had great pain at the chest and dulness at the stomach, as though what I had taken lay there as it might lie in a dish, without warmth or life.

"I was also much troubled with a sickening wind or gas that came up into my throat, sometimes in such volume that I could hardly draw my breath. Then I would have frequent attacks of sick headache, with a pressure upon the head as of a heavy weight. I resorted to every means I

could hear of for relief, but the disease appeared to be too deeply seated for any medicines known to me or to my friends, so that I got to be more and more of a confirmed invalid as time went on.

"Not to weary you with the numerous details of my illness I will simply say that my strength continued to fail, and I eventually became so weak as to make getting about the house a difficult and exhausting matter. It was not until I had been in this condition nearly five years that a kind Providence placed in our way the means of recovery. In December, 1889, I happened to read in a newspaper an article about Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup and what it had done in a case very much like my own.

"Inasmuch as I had no hope of help from any other source, I felt moved to try the Syrup and see whether there was any truth in the claims made on its behalf. I procured a bottle from Mr. W. L. Clarke, Chemist, The Pavement, Forest Hill, and found wonderful relief after I had taken that one bottle. Confident that I had come upon the right medicine at last, I got, perhaps, two bottles more in all, when all the bad symptoms left me, and I was soon as well and strong as ever. Since then *I always keep a bottle in the house, and if any of my family ail anything a few doses sets us right.* (Signed) Mrs. S. C. Bowall, 45, Stanstead Road, Forest Hill, London, January 1st, 1895."

No building would ever be destroyed by fire if the first spark were extinguished the moment watchful eyes looked upon it. Be ready, and have the means of prevention where you can lay hands right on them. That's the way to save time, money, and trouble. As with fires, so with diseases. They spring from small beginnings; and as the beginning is almost always in the stomach (indigestion and dyspepsia), a few doses of Mother Seigel's Syrup, taken *now*, will do for you what it does for Mrs. Bowall, and for many other wise and thoughtful women.